For Immediate Release
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Announcing the VISN 3 Bariatric Surgery Program at the James J. Peters VA

According to the Centers for Disease Control, obesity is the top health risk facing Americans today. In fact, obesity is said to result in an estimated 400,000 deaths per year and the annual cost to our economy is estimated to be over $122.9 billion dollars.

In response to these staggering statistics and in an effort to support the vital health needs of our area Veterans, local VA medical centers have implemented several healthy living and weight-management programs. While programs such as “MOVE!” and others have been very successful in helping our veterans lower and manage their weight, some patients will find that certain genetic or metabolic issues prevent them from reaching their weight loss goals. For these individuals, surgery may present the best possible means of achieving weight loss. For that reason, the New York/New Jersey VA Hospital Network (VISN 3) moved to develop a state-of-the-art Bariatric Surgery Program.

Bariatric surgery is as much a process, as it is a procedure. The successful bariatric program will comprise many medical disciplines and the detailed coordination of care. Prospective candidates will undergo nutritional counseling, psychological evaluations and extensive medical screening for several months before surgery will be considered. Generally speaking, candidates for surgery will average more than 279 pounds, have an average Body Mass Index (BMI) above 40 and will have exhibited a consistent inability to lose weight by other means.
After surgery, patients can expect to experience weight loss of up to 50% in the first six months and up to 77% percent of their excess weight within one year after surgery.

The VISN 3 Bariatric Surgical Team was assembled in late Spring of 2009 and is headquartered at the James J. Peters Medical Center, in the Bronx. Team members meet regularly to develop and maintain the integrated processes that are required to ensure the most positive outcomes for our Veteran patients. The key members of the team include surgeons, endocrinologists, nutritionists, psychologists and a host of medical professionals. The team is currently in the process of screening prospective patients and anticipates conducting their first procedures in the Spring of 2010.

For more information related to this story or the James J. Peters VA Medical Center, please contact Jim Connell, Public Affairs Officer, at 718.584.9000, Ext. 6620.

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Photos follow:

[Image of a group of people in a meeting.

Bariatric Team Members Discuss Consultation Requirements]
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L-R, Registered Dietician, Heather Perillo; Surgeon and Practice Chief, Dr. Tomas Heimann; Bariatric Surgeon, Dr. Leaque Ahmed