

DR. TERRY SIMPSON

Author: Celeste Sepessy

Issue: April, 2009, Page 171

SPECIALTY: ADVANCED LAPAROSCOPIC AND WEIGHT LOSS SURGERY

How did you end up in Arizona?

I'm a quarter Native American, and after I did my residency, I owed the government a couple of years. I thought, 'Oh, I'll come down here for three years and work for the Indian health services and then go back to Seattle.' That was in 1991.

How does weight loss surgery differ from other types of medicine?

In surgery, you typically get a patient when they're very sick. You hurt them and then they get better. You'll see them post-op once or twice. You may have thousands of patients in a career but not remember any of them.

In weight-loss surgery, you do this operation, you make the change, and you get to see them through that change. And every year they get better and better. It's dealing more with a reversal of chronic disease.

How has your field evolved since you began in 1991?

We have expanded the uses. Instead of only having big open surgery on very big people who are super-morbidly obese, we have brought [surgeries] to people who are just obese. They might have 50 pounds of weight to lose. These are people who clearly struggle, and now we have a tool for them that we didn't have years ago. Now we're looking at weight-loss surgery as probably the best prevention you can do for adults.

In what way is your profession rewarding?

I've had a mother say, 'I got to go to Universal Studios and go on the rides with my kids. I couldn't do that last year.' Or when they say, 'I know this sounds vain, but I don't have to go to the big ladies' shop anymore.'

What type of patients are you treating more often these days?

We're seeing more and more kids. There was a study done recently that showed children who have obesity have the quality-of-life equivalent to teenagers who have terminal cancer. How they look at themselves makes the teenage years tough, even if you're the quarterback. So it is fun taking those [obese] kids and doing that.

What are you doing when you're not seeing patients?

I've written three books about weight-loss surgery, and I'm currently writing a novel. I have a book in press now called Cigar Talk.



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