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Four South Africans receive life-changing bariatric surgery as national obesity guidelines are released. Pretoria, South Africa – On Wednesday, 26 November 2025, four South Africans living with severe obesity will receive sponsored bariatric surgery through the Obesity Community Fund's (OCF) first official theatre list at Zuid-Afrikaans Hospital. Built "for patients, by patients", the OCF is a non-profit initiative that brings together medical professionals, industry sponsors and recovered patients to make obesity treatment more affordable and accessible. The surgeries mark a major milestone for obesity care in South Africa — coinciding with the publication of the country's first clinical guidelines for obesity treatment in the South African Medical Journal (SAMJ) by the South African Metabolic Medicine and Surgery Society (SAMMSS).

Cutting-edge technology and training drive affordability

The 2025 theatre list is powered by the same partners who supported the 2024 innovation trial — led by Respiratory Care Africa (RCA), whose sponsorship and clinical support make these surgeries possible at a fraction of the standard cost. RCA supplies advanced surgical equipment and perioperative technology for bariatric surgery and has committed to ongoing training of local surgeons, theatre teams and clinicians to expand South Africa's capacity for safe, world-class metabolic care.

In addition, Vertice has supplied the surgical stapling systems used in the sponsored procedures, further reducing costs while maintaining high clinical standards for patient safety and outcomes.

"Our commitment goes beyond equipment," says Christiaan de Wet, Managing Director of Respiratory Care Africa (RCA). "We believe in sustainable healthcare systems. That means training, skills transfer, and helping hospitals and patients access life-changing care that would otherwise remain out of reach."

Through this partnership model — combining discounted medical technology, device sponsorship, hospital support, and the OCF's patient-led funding — surgery becomes significantly more affordable, without compromising safety or multidisciplinary standards.

New national guidelines set the standard for treating obesity as a disease

In a landmark moment for South African healthcare, the SAMJ has published the first official clinical guidelines for diagnosing and treating obesity as a chronic, complex disease. Developed by SAMMSS, the guidelines outline evidence-based pathways for medical, nutritional, psychological and surgical treatment, and call for a coordinated, multidisciplinary approach with long-term follow-up.

“Having national guidelines means that obesity will finally be treated with the seriousness and compassion it deserves,” says Mari Lee, OCF trustee, bariatric patient and health communication specialist. “Obesity is not a personal failure — it's a medical condition. These guidelines bring South Africa in line with international best practice.”

Safe, proven and life-changing treatment

Bariatric surgery is one of the most effective long-term treatments for severe obesity. International evidence shows sustained weight loss for most patients, with high remission rates for type 2 diabetes, hypertension and sleep apnoea. In high-volume, accredited centres, complication rates are low and comparable to many other common surgical procedures.

“At The Obesity Health Centre, we see the results every day,” says Dr Thinus Smit, bariatric surgeon and SAMMSS proctor. “Metabolic surgery changes lives — not for vanity, but for health. It adds years of quality life and reduces long-term health costs for both patients and the system.”

Collaboration for sustainable care

This first OCF theatre list represents a national collaboration between public benefit, private healthcare, and patient advocacy, led by the Obesity Community Fund, Respiratory Care Africa (RCA), Vertice, the Innovative Surgery Fund (ISF) and Zuid-Afrikaans Hospital.

Together, the partners are proving that world-class obesity care can be delivered safely, affordably and sustainably in South Africa — and that patients can play an active role in shaping the future of obesity treatment.

About the partners

Respiratory Care Africa (RCA)

RCA's purpose is to be the desired partner to extend and enhance life by improving patient care through education, clinical support and cutting-edge technology. RCA is committed to sustainable healthcare solutions that improve outcomes and expand access to high-quality bariatric care through local training and capacity building.

Vertice

Vertice is a South African medical technology company that partners with healthcare providers to supply advanced surgical devices and solutions. By providing the stapling systems for these sponsored bariatric surgeries, Vertice supports safer procedures, consistent outcomes and more affordable access to life-changing treatment.

Innovative Surgery Fund (ISF)

The Innovative Surgery Fund is a non-profit organisation focused on improving access to life-changing obesity treatments, while also providing surgical training and research opportunities for healthcare professionals.

Obesity Community Fund (OCF)

The Obesity Community Fund NPC (Reg. No. 2024/805666/08) is a South African, patient-led non-profit company dedicated to making evidence-based obesity treatment affordable and accessible. Through a combination of corporate sponsorship and patient crowd-funding, the Fund supports research, education and patient advocacy, and helps more people living with obesity to access comprehensive treatment, including bariatric surgery.

For more information or to arrange interviews with clinicians and patient representatives, please contact:

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