

Hi to all...I've been reading posts for about 3 months now and this is my first one. Things moved fast for me and I told myself that, after my surgery, I would share my experiences because others' experiences here helped me so much in my decision to move forward. I'm posting this in both the VSG and Mexico forum.

I started exploring WLS very casually. I'm 5'3" with a high weight of 260. I'd lost about 20 pounds over the last few years, which while helpful, was a long way from where I need to be.

I've had significant knee pain for at least 10 years and in the last 2 years the pain has limited what I can do. Long walks are exhausting. AND, I walk better than I stand. I frequently have to do presentations on my feet and am often soaked in sweat after anything more than 10 minutes standing.

So, I went to a good orthopedic doctor. X-rays show my knee is bone on bone and a knee replacement is the only option. However, my doctor won't do the surgery until, in his words, have a "radical weight loss". He said I'd never make it through physical rehabilitation at my current weight. The word "radical" stuck with me.

I checked my insurance policy and it very clearly excludes anything to do with bariatric surgery. I researched surgery here in Texas and saw nothing less than \$30,000. I had heard of people traveling to Mexico for surgery, and started to explore it.

I live only 180 miles from the border and the thought of surgery in Mexico scared me. I used to cross the border routinely...it was my favorite mini-vacation...but since the drug cartel violence of the last 10 years I had not done so.

So I started reading...every night and all weekend. Posts on this site and other sites, newspapers from border cities, academic studies on bariatric surgery, papers written on health tourism in Mexico, reviews on surgeons and hospitals...anything Google could provide.

I read lots and lots of very positive experiences in Tijuana and Mexicali with surgeons who seem to be well-known and accepted by the WLS community as highly competent and using facilities that were as good as or better than we expect in the United States. Almost all of the experiences were very positive. So...the way my mind works, I figured more people write about negative experiences than positive ones so the positive must VASTLY outweigh the negative.

Flying into San Diego and going from there was a possibility. Still....I live only 2 ½ hours from the border with a number of sister Texas/Mexico cities very close. Couldn't there be a competent bariatric surgeon using a good hospital there? I knew from the

beginning I was totally on my own with this and the idea of a short drive there and back was very appealing.

I kept coming back to the same doctor...Dr. Felipe Cantu in Reynosa across from McAllen, TX. He had only a fraction of the reviews and posts as the doctors in Tijuana and Mexicali. All the reviews were positive, numerous Google searches revealed nothing negative, he is a member American Society for Metabolic & Bariatric Surgery, and he utilized Christus Muguerza hospital in Reynosa. The Christus hospital system is a Catholic health system with an extensive network of hospitals in Texas and also in New Mexico, Arkansas and Louisiana. Christus has acquired a number of hospitals in Mexico as well, including Christus Muguerza in Reynosa. A known hospital system was very comforting.

So...I called. After speaking with someone in their office, I connected with Lupita, the patient coordinator out of Austin. She has a terrific story. She had surgery at a similar age and weight as I was, and I began to get interested and more comfortable. I honestly don't remember what she said that made the light bulb go off, but she did. It hit me hard that, if I could have lost weight and kept it off without surgery, I would have done it a long time ago. At that point, surgery wasn't really an option anymore. I had to do it or I was committing myself to a shorter life full of pain, medications, and devoid of many activities I enjoy.

My first conversation with Lupita was January 16<sup>th</sup> of this year. We started talking about possible dates in that first conversation. After I completed all the medical history forms and Dr. Cantu reviewed, we scheduled surgery for February 8<sup>th</sup> at 8:00 a.m. His preliminary recommendation was the VSG which I had been researching along with the mini-gastric bypass. Given my preferences and condition, he felt that a VSG would be just as effective for me with fewer long-term restrictions. Lupita gave me very detailed information about all of the expenses involved in the surgery as well as before and after.

Lupita sent surgery instructions on January 19<sup>th</sup>. I began a list, based on many posts on this and other websites, of what to take with me to Reynosa and what to have ready at home when I returned. I asked for the post-op diet prior to surgery so I could stock up for a while. Surgery was scheduled on a Friday. I would drive down to Reynosa on Wednesday and Lupita would pick me up Thursday morning early for pre-op blood tests, chest x-ray, and EKG. Then back to Reynosa Friday morning for surgery.

As the time got closer, I got more nervous. My mantra was "if I could have done this without surgery, I would have done it a long time ago." Still, I approached the Thursday morning pre-op tests as if I was just checking it all out and will decide after that.

From the blood draw through the EKG with the internist...all was positive. I liked the hospital and was always greeted with a smile. I speak very little Spanish and rarely felt as if I was not communicating well with the staff.

By far, the most reassuring thing that happened...and I wish everyone in my circumstances that day could experience...was visiting with one of Dr. Cantu's patients who had VSG surgery the day before. Lupita brought me along to check on her. Her surgery was in the afternoon the day before, and we were there the next morning. She looked great! She was talking, had great color, joked about being sleepy and getting "in trouble" for walking out in the hall without a hospital gown over her regular clothes. She was released from the hospital about 2:30 that afternoon and went back to McAllen with Lupita and me. On the ride home, I realized I was very peaceful about the decision, comfortable about the doctor and hospital, and very excited to get the surgery the next day and get on with a new life. My very grateful thanks to Kim from Texas...I know I'll likely never see you again and I'm so grateful you let me share your experience.

So...day of surgery, here's how it went. The day before, we changed the surgery time to 10 a.m.

- 8:30 a.m. – Lupita picks me up at the hotel
- 9:00 a.m. – Final hospital paperwork and payment
- 9:30 a.m. – I'm taken in a wheel chair (hospital policy) to a pre-op preparation area. I change into a hospital gown and booties. The nurse starts an IV in the back of my left hand (I'm right handed). Dr. Cantu, Dr. Hernandez and their anesthesiologist and GI surgeon all stop by to talk.
- 10:00 a.m. – I get my pre-op "margarita" to ease me toward anesthesia for surgery. That's the last thing I remember before surgery.
- 11:00 a.m. – I wake up in post-op with a nurse checking on me. I knew I was in a different place. I was very comfortable and not sure the surgery had been done. I peeked down the front of my hospital gown....and there were small bandages. I was done! Dr. Cantu came in at some point and told me they had repaired a hernia as well as removed much of a very large stomach.
- 1:00 p.m. – I'm taken to my room. I doze off and on most of the afternoon. After about 4 p.m., I try to stay awake in the hope that I can sleep some that night. I later asked if Dr. Cantu would give me something to help me sleep and he agreed.
- Throughout the afternoon and evening nurses came in to check vitals and my IV. All were very, very nice and eager to do whatever I needed.
- I was in virtually no pain. A little sore is all. The pain med was scheduled for every 6 hours and I had no trouble in between.
- 10:00 p.m. – Last pain meds into the IV and something to help me sleep. I sleep well, considering it's a hospital, and nurses came in to check vitals.

- 7:00 a.m. Friday – Dr. Cantu comes by to check. I'm feeling fine. Anesthesiologist comes in to check also.
- 9:00 a.m. – I'm getting restless. I feel good. I want a shower, some ice chips and a walk. I get the walk first. Then a shower.
- 11:00 a.m. – Food! OK, tepid tea and ice chips but I'm thrilled. The deal is to take a small sip of tea, a few ice chips, and then walk around the room. Rinse and repeat. I had gurgles in my stomach but no pain or difficulty.
- 1:00 p.m. – Now I'm really restless. Lupita comes in and I make a pitch to let me drive home that afternoon. Nuria the nutritionist comes in and reviews all the post-op diet stages with me and lets me ask countless questions.
- 3:00 p.m. – After multiple conversations and negotiations, I am discharged from the hospital and allowed to drive back home. I seriously don't know how I could have made it through another night at the hospital or even in a hotel. I felt great, tons of energy, my BP was down without any meds, and I wanted to go home.

That was a week ago yesterday. I drove home, alone, without any issues at all. Rested Sunday at home. Went to work Monday morning and have been on a full schedule ever since. I'm down about 12 pounds since surgery, feel great, BP still normal without meds, and working every day to get in my 60 grams of protein and 64 ounces of fluid. Graduation from clear liquids to full liquids after 5 days was something to celebrate.

I know everyone is different and doing WLS on your own with such a short hospital stay and down time after isn't for all. It's working for me. My only regret is waiting so long.

If you've read this far...thanks. Without reading about other people's experiences I am not sure I would have had the confidence to move forward. So I'm very grateful to all who went before me, and hope my story brings some hope and comfort to those considering WLS.