

# southern health news

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Tapping into  
weight loss

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## Mobile app boosts weight loss

BY SARAH GARVIS

An innovative iPhone app called *W8Loss2Go* is being used in a Flinders Medical Centre trial to see if it helps motivate and encourage severely obese young people to lose weight and improve their health.

The app, developed by Dr **Robert Pretlow** in the United States (US), is based on techniques that are applied to treating addictions, which have been translated into the obesity area.

The trial is a partnership between Dr Pretlow, and researchers from Flinders Medical Centre's Department of Paediatrics, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), and Flinders University.

CAMHS Research Manager Dr **Leigh Roeger** said researchers would aim to recruit up to 15 young people receiving bariatric care to the trial.

"Young people with a high body mass index can face a range of social and personal challenges," Dr Roeger said.

"We are seeking ways of delivering additional youth friendly treatment that is readily accessible, such as an iPhone app."

The 18-week study is the first of its kind to test the effectiveness of the app in motivating and supporting youths in a tertiary bariatric setting to make dramatic changes to their eating habits.

At present, morbidly obese – those with a BMI of 40 or more – young people in South Australia are offered lap band surgery on a selected basis.

As part of the trial, participants will be given an iPhone with the *W8Loss2Go* app, a set of Bluetooth scales and regular access to Paediatric Nurse **Kerri Sutton** via the app's chat function.

Participants will also be linked up with a peer buddy (of similar age and interests) in the US. Using the app's chat function, the paediatric nurse will be able to interact with the study participants every few days rather than waiting three or four weeks between appointments.

"This research will help us learn more about how we can harness the power of mobile health technologies to engage with young people and keep them motivated towards addressing their very serious health problems," Kerri said.

During the first 10 weeks of the study, participants will identify and list all of their problem foods and then abstain from each food for a minimum of 10 days. The app provides a range of techniques including photos, motivational tools and coping skills to avoid eating the problem foods.

The second part of the study will address the amount of food consumed, with participants required to significantly reduce their food intake.

Other key researchers involved in the study include FMC's Head of Paediatrics and Child Health Dr **Brian Coppin**, Consultant Paediatric Surgeon **Sanjeev Khurana**, CAMHS Clinical Director Associate Professor **Stephen Allison**, Southern Mental Health Associate Professor **Tarun Bastiampillai** and Flinders University Faculty of Health Professor **Richard Reed**.

## Ellen's new lease on life

Growing up, **Ellen Burne** always remembers being 'chubby'.

At 17, she began struggling with thyroid problems and started putting on weight rapidly until she weighed 92kg.

"I couldn't lose it – I tried lots of different things but nothing worked for me," Ellen, 20, said.

At 18, and weighing close to 100kg, Ellen was referred to Flinders Medical Centre's (FMC) Paediatric Bariatric Clinic, where she was deemed eligible for lap band surgery.

In 2011, Ellen – who is a student midwife with the University of South Australia – underwent surgery at FMC to have a gastric band inserted.

The band is placed around the top of the stomach creating a small pouch which restricts the amount of food a person can eat at any one time. The food then slowly leaks into the main stomach and is absorbed normally, keeping the patient feeling fuller for longer.

In the following three months, Ellen shed more than 20kg, shrinking down to 63kg. She now weighs 66kg and has maintained this weight for more than six months.

"The gastric band has helped me to make big changes to the types of food I eat and also the portion sizes.

"I am a generally happier, healthier and more positive person, and I am much more social.

"My self-confidence has improved greatly which has allowed me to do a lot of things I wouldn't have before, for example, travelling through the United Kingdom by myself – I never would have had the confidence to do that before losing the weight."

Ellen said apps like *W8Loss2Go* would be an invaluable support for young people battling to get their weight under control.

"I found myself looking for support from people who really didn't understand what I was experiencing so having the buddy system would help immensely."



Former FMC bariatric patient Ellen Burne (centre), with (from left) Dietitian Kate Pettigrew, Paediatric Nurse Kerri Sutton and CAMHS Research Manager Dr Leigh Roeger.