Health and Wellness Center Returns to ‘Reality’

Reality TV made a return engagement to campus Feb. 15 as the Anschutz Health and Wellness Center hosted a casting call for the fifth season of ABC’s “Extreme Weight Loss.”

The Anschutz Health and Wellness Center is no stranger to “Extreme Weight Loss.” Participants in Season 4 spent the first 90 days there, working with Powell and Wellness Center staff, including Medical Director Holly Wyatt, MD. Wyatt was on the scene Saturday, handing out information about the center, which focuses on medically supervised weight loss through balanced nutrition and increased exercise levels.

“It’s about giving people the skills they need when they go home and face new challenges in managing their weight,” Wyatt said.

Season 4 will debut May 27, and details are top-secret until that time, said Lisa Bailey, senior marketing and communications manager for the Wellness Center. But she said she thinks the show, when it airs, will help to raise the center’s profile.

“We expect to become a destination weight-loss center for people around the country,” Bailey said.

The Denver area is one of 13 cities scheduled as part of a nationwide tour by television production company Eyeworks USA to find Reality TV made a return engagement to campus Feb. 15 as the Anschutz Health and Wellness Center hosted a casting call for the fifth season of ABC’s “Extreme Weight Loss.”

The first floor of the center was crowded by 10 a.m. with people hopeful to be chosen for the series, which follows the lives of very obese individuals who attempt to safely lose one-half of their body weight during a one-year regimen of training, diet and exercise under the direction of trainer and “transformation specialist” Chris Powell.

People hopeful of being cast for Season 5 of “Extreme Weight Loss” crowded the first floor of the Anschutz Health and Wellness Center Feb. 15.

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Kathy Kesner, coordinator of UCH’s Surgical Weight Loss Center (foreground), answers questions at the casting call.

Holly Wyatt, MD, medical director of the Wellness Center, speaks with attendees.

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The Denver area is one of 13 cities scheduled as part of a nation-wide tour by television production company Eyeworks USA to find
participants for Season 5. Casting candidates Saturday carried folders of photos and information about themselves into group application sessions on the second floor of the Wellness Center. There they talked about their backgrounds, their struggles with their weight, and their reasons for wanting to make a change in their lives.

It’s complicated. The power of emotional factors in weight gain was evident during one session as Vanessa Bond, an Eyeworks USA casting director, went around the room, asking the group to share their stories. Two spoke of suffering physical abuse and an accompanying loss of self-esteem. Many spoke of cycles of gain and accompanying recrimination that led to guilt and additional gain. All said they aspire to regain control of their lives by shedding pounds.

“I have a good life,” one said. “If I could lose this weight it could be even better.”

Another spoke with pride of working two jobs and volunteering to help other people. “I think I’ve been a good friend to others but not to myself,” she said.

Asked what she would do if she reached her weight-loss goals, one said she would climb Pikes Peak. “At the top I’ll take a photo of myself,” she said. “It will be the start of the life I’m not living now.”

“It takes a lot of guts to do something like this and be as vulnerable as you are,” Bond told the group as the talk drew to a close. Eyeworks, she said, will review mountains of tapes provided by applicants to choose a handful of people for Season 5.

“You’ve already made a choice to do something about your weight,” she said. “Don’t beat yourself up if you’re not chosen.”

“There are so many factors we have to weigh,” Bond said after the group left the room. “We’re looking for people who are ready to do this, both mentally and physically, and have a burning desire to make a change in their lives.”

Back on the first floor, people continued to file in, complete paperwork and await their turn to tell their stories.

Debbie Donaldson, 53, of Littleton, said she wants to lose 100 to 125 pounds. She said she prefers the “non-competitive” approach of “Extreme Weight Loss” to “Biggest Loser,” which pits individuals against one another. “I also like the one-on-one help the show gives,” she said.

Jaylene Hege, 27, of Aurora, and Shannon Rice, 29, of Brighton, sat together at a small table, having just met. Both of the women said they currently weigh 300 pounds and would like to shed 140. Rice said her struggle with her weight is complicated by polycystic ovarian syndrome, a hormonal disorder that often causes weight gain.

“I need some help, but I want to be successful,” Rice said. “I want to be around for my three-year-old.”