“Bod Pod” Set for Star Turn in Employee Health and Wellness

For fans of the sci-fi classic 2001: A Space Odyssey, a mere glance at the sleek cylindrical contraption triggers memories of that film’s classic line: “Open the pod doors, HAL.”

Happily, that’s not a rogue computer on a power trip in an exam room in the Employee Health and Wellness Clinic. But it is a pod, and it has achieved its own measure of pop culture fame (thanks to appearances on television’s “The Biggest Loser.”) It’s the Bod Pod®, and it has a mission: to give a high-tech assist to individuals who want to know their body composition.

Get well soon. Hospital leaders think the Bod Pod could assist in another mission: encouraging employees and patients to develop safe and effective plans to improve their health through diet, exercise and other preventive measures. The benefits, they hope, could be significant: reduced medical claims, lower premiums and increased revenue, not only from the one-time test, but especially from downstream referrals to clinics.

Employees will get a first look at the Bod Pod at the hospital’s “Healthy for Good” event January 21, and get an opportunity to win free body composition tests. The hospital plans to make it available free of charge to employees who take the annual Health Risk Evaluation and have three or more risk factors. Other employees who are interested in developing a wellness plan may schedule a body composition assessment for $25, says Employee Health and Wellness Manager Diann Eason, RN, MS.

Patients who sign up for the hospital’s Executive Health Program (EHP) will also get a Bod Pod test and a consultation with a nutritionist and/or exercise physiologist as part of their regular half-day package of services, says EHP administrator Sarah Kabat.

She says the hospital also plans to market a Bod Pod test to the general public – it’s currently only used in Colorado by the Denver Broncos and University of Colorado athletic teams – for $25. She expects it to be available by the first week of February.

It’s in the air. The Bod Pod calculates the percentage of body fat by measuring the volume of air displaced when an individual is inside its cylindrical chamber, which is hooked up to a digital scale and

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The system requires only a couple of minutes to make the calculation and produce a one-page report showing body fat percentage and a “Body Fat Rating” table that helps the individual interpret the measurements. For example, a body fat percentage of 25 percent for a female is considered “moderately lean,” or “generally acceptable for good health.”

The report also shows the individual’s resting metabolic rate, which it uses to determine the maximum amount of calories that can be consumed per day, depending on daily activity level.

**Truth teller.** “It’s a lie detector,” Kabat says. “A person may not see the scale move [down], but the Bod Pod will show if he or she has had a decrease in the percentage of body fat. On the other hand, it will also show if the program the person is on isn’t working. It’s a good way to keep people on track.”

Eason says Employee Health and Wellness staff will review the report with those who take the test, and schedule follow-up consultations or make clinic referrals. In turn, she says, clinics such as Internal Medicine, Endocrinology and Bariatric Surgery could make patient referrals for Bod Pod testing.

“It will make us competitive for patients needing a wide range of services,” predicts Kabat, who adds she expects that the Bod Pod will pay for itself in two to three years through revenue generated from EHP and its partnerships with other hospital clinics.

“It’s not just a gimmick,” she asserts. “It’s a low-cost way for people to get accurate findings about their health. That knowledge is power for people who are motivated to be successful.”

The Bod Pod isn’t the only way to calculate body fat, but Eason says it offers advantages over other standard techniques, including hydrostatic weighing, which requires the individual to enter a tank of water, and dexta scans – currently used in the hospital’s Clinical Translational Research Center – which use radiation. It also takes less time than either of those methods.

But the information the Bod Pod produces is only as valuable if individuals choose to use it, Eason concedes.

“It gives us objective evidence, but people have to be willing to work on programs that will help them manage their wellness,” she says.

*Get a look at the Bod Pod during the hospital’s “Healthy for Good” event, Thursday, January 21, in AOP Room 2005/2006.*