

Meet the Medical Director

Dr. T. Karl Byrne



[Dr. Byrne's "Find a Doctor" Profile](#)

1. **Name/title**

T. Karl Byrne, M.D., FACS.
Medical Director, MUSC Bariatric Surgery Program
Professor of Surgery

2. **What is your role/main focus?**

My clinical role and main focus is to provide quality and safe surgical care to patients undergoing weight loss surgery. My administrative role is to ensure that our program remains accredited as a center of excellence for bariatric surgery and to ensure that our outcomes are as good as or better than nationally reported data. Luckily, I work daily with a wonderful team of professionals including our dietitians, mid-level providers, office staff and coordinator who make this job relatively easy.

3. **What is something you would like the physicians/your peers to know about your specialty?**

The specialty of bariatric surgery was vilified by the medical profession for many years. Now the specialty is "mainstream" and growing. The bias against weight loss surgery is beginning to diminish. Years of data have confirmed that bariatric surgery is safe, clinically effective and cost effective, especially in patients who have weight related co morbidities. However, the biggest obstacle for patients who need these life-saving procedures is access to care. For example, in South Carolina, the state health plan does not cover bariatric surgery despite the fact that CMS and many other plans embrace it. It is a travesty that at MUSC we can't offer this surgery to our own employees who have the state health plan. This is a constant disappointment to all of us involved in the program.

4. **What do you believe are MUSC's greatest opportunities?**

We have the opportunity, given the appropriate resources, to provide a state of the art regional center for the treatment of obesity and related diseases at MUSC. All the components are already present in various forms on campus. To make it happen would require a catalyst from hospital and MUSC-P administration. In a state with the 8th highest obesity rate in the nation we could provide much needed services to an underserved patient population.

5. **How long have you been at MUSC and what brought you here?**

I came in 1992, so I've been here 21 years. I could see at the time that there was reorganization in the department of surgery with many younger and talented faculty being recruited. I originally came to MUSC as a trauma critical care surgeon. I performed bariatric procedures "on the side" because there was a growing need and I had been trained in these procedures during residency at MCV. Within several years, the bariatric part of my practice completely took over because of the demand. Dr. Crawford, the chairman of the department, realized that bariatric surgery was here to stay and was very supportive of a change in my career path at this time.

6. **Where did you grow up?**

I grew up in central Ireland. I attended medical school at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin and spent the early years of my surgical training in Ireland and the UK.

7. **What do you like to do in your free time?**

I cycle, and I play music; I play the guitar and sing.

8. **Who has inspired you in your life and why?**

My students and my residents inspire me daily because they make me question conventional wisdom and inspire me to maintain my intellectual curiosity. This alone has been enough to keep me in academic practice all these years.