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So....You Need a Hysterectomy???

**Don't let a hysterectomy
hold you back!**

Hysterectomy is the surgical removal of the uterus and the cervix. It remains the most common non pregnancy-related surgical procedure performed in the United States. Approximately 600,000 hysterectomies are performed per year. The most common indications for hysterectomy are symptomatic fibroids (non-cancerous growths), endometriosis (non-cancerous growth of the lining of the uterus) and symptomatic pelvic relaxation (dropping or falling of the uterus).

Traditionally, hysterectomies are performed through incisions spreading across the abdomen horizontally measuring 6 to 8 inches long. The recovery time from this type of surgery was significant. Initially, laparoscopic-assisted vaginal hysterectomies, first performed in the late 1980's started the trend toward a laparoscopic route for hysterectomies.

Laparoscopy is a type of surgery that can be performed without making a large incision in the abdomen. Instead, it uses small dime-size incisions in the abdomen to place surgical devices. A laparoscope contains a fiber optic light and a magnifying video camera. The laparoscope is inserted through a navel incision and allows the surgeon to see inside the abdomen. This was meant to provide a less invasive means for hysterectomies with the benefits of less blood loss, less pain and scarring, a shortened hospital stay (or an outpatient surgery stay, a quicker recovery time and return to routine daily activities, and higher patient satisfaction. However, there has been a slow acceptance towards using the laparoscope as the major route for hysterectomies. This is because conventional laparoscopic surgery has a steep learning curve for physicians. The introduction of robotic surgery was meant to allow many physicians the ability to offer minimally invasive surgery to their patients foregoing the steep learning curve required with conventional laparoscopy.

Minimally invasive surgery is utilized in other specialties outside of general gynecology; namely, urology, urogynecology and gynecology oncology. The two methods used to perform a hysterectomy via a minimally invasive route include conventional laparoscopy and the da Vinci surgical system.

Conventional laparoscopy has a two-dimensional imaging and has a steep learning curve. It involves counter-intuitive hand movements and standing. Once over the learning curve, however, this method does offer some advantages over the da Vinci surgical system: The incisions on the abdomen are smaller, each measuring only 5mm, and this procedure is not restricted to performance only at hospitals. Thus, patients may enjoy the comforts of one on one private nursing care in an outpatient surgical facility. Also, because this method of hysterectomy uses standard laparoscopes, restrictions with available equipment does not exist for scheduling more than one procedure at the same time at the same facility.

The da Vinci robotic system uses three dimensional imaging and instruments that move like the surgeons wrist. Although it is called a robot, the surgeon performs all of the surgical maneuvers (not the robot!) while sitting at a console and directly performs the surgery. This helps guard against fatigue and aids in reduction of hand tremor and solves some of the challenges involved with conventional laparoscopy. The incisions on the abdomen are usually four in number and slightly larger than those used with conventional laparoscopy. Two of them are 12mm and two of them are 8 mm when performing hysterectomies for non-cancerous reasons.

The biggest downside to the da Vinci robot system is the cost of the machine and the limited availability of the machine for scheduling surgical procedures. In Wichita, Kansas there are only two da Vinci robotic systems available for use among all specialties. One system is at Via Christi St. Joseph Hospital and the other is at Wesley Medical Center. The number of cases available for scheduling daily with the da Vinci system is only two to three which restricts the availability when considering the number of surgeons desiring to schedule surgeries utilizing the da Vinci surgical system.

With the availability of minimally invasive surgical methods for hysterectomies, you can get back to your life faster. If you are faced with having a hysterectomy, talk with your doctor about the minimally invasive surgical options that are available to you.

