

Medical College To Evaluate New Gallbladder Surgery

Medical College of Wisconsin surgeons at Froedtert Memorial Lutheran Hospital have begun the evaluation of a new, less painful, and less costly procedure for gallbladder surgery.

"The new procedure is called laparoscopic laser cholecystectomy and it is both safe and effective," said Constantine Frantzides, M.D., Ph.D., an assistant professor of surgery at the Medical College, who has been instructing faculty physicians in the technique since last year.

According to Dr. Frantzides, the procedure requires only three tiny punctures below the chest, where instruments are introduced, and a very small incision near the naval, through which the compressed gallbladder is ultimately removed. A thin scope is also inserted through the incision to view the surgical field during the entire procedure.

"Patients undergoing the procedure can expect a shorter hospital stay, a faster recovery period and the advantage of virtually no scarring," he said. Twenty million Americans suffer

from gallbladder disease and surgical removal of the gallbladder is performed over half a million times a year in the U.S., making the potential impact of this technique immense, according to Dr. Frantzides.

"When I first heard about the technique in 1988, I thought it was something we should be investigating here, since we are a teaching institution," Dr. Frantzides said. "As we work with the technique, I plan to explore its effectiveness even further."

During the procedure, the surgeon views the surgical field, projected from the scope inserted in the navel-area incision, on video monitors placed on either side of the patient's head. Although Dr. Frantzides uses a laser to release the diseased gallbladder, not all surgeons use this approach. The gallbladder is eventually collapsed and removed through the navel-area incision.

Studies indicate that about half of the gallbladder disease patients who qualify for the surgery can have the procedure done on an outpatient basis. For

others, it usually involves only an overnight hospital stay, with patients resuming full activity within a week. After the surgery, a patient can expect mild stomach discomfort, for which medication is prescribed for about 48 hours.

Traditional gallbladder surgery normally involves a four-day hospital stay and four- to six-week recovery period.

As in any surgery, rare complications are possible, including bleeding and injury to the bladder or bowel. For this reason, patients are thoroughly screened, to be certain they have no history of abdominal or pelvic surgery, cardiovascular or respiratory problems and that they are not pregnant.

The new surgery is the latest of several recent developments to simplify treatment of gallbladder disease. Some physicians are also using new, non-surgical techniques to dissolve or crush gallstones. These, however, leave the diseased gallbladder in place, making the recurrence of gallstones highly probable.