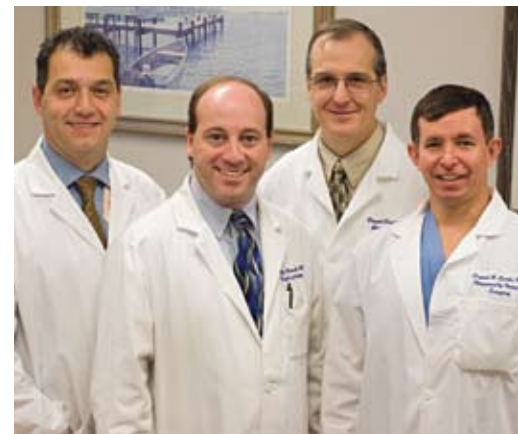


SURGERY

WITHOUT INCISIONS

By Scott P. Edwards



Drs. Oz Harmanli, John Romanelli, David Desilets, and David Earle teamed up to perform this procedure.

IMAGINE YOUR DOCTOR TELLING YOU THAT YOU NEED TO HAVE YOUR GALLBLADDER REMOVED, BUT THAT THE SURGEON DOING IT WILL NOT NEED TO MAKE ANY INCISIONS. SOUND IMPOSSIBLE? AT BAYSTATE MEDICAL CENTER, IT'S ANYTHING BUT.

As new techniques, technologies, and surgical expertise have developed, many types of surgery have become less invasive. Surgical procedures from the simple to the complex that used to require large incisions can often be performed today using miniaturized instruments, robotics, and tiny incisions. And in some cases, no incisions are needed at all.

Surgeons at Baystate have become pioneers in the emerging field of NOTES®—Natural Orifice Translumenal Endoscopic Surgery—which involves passing flexible surgical tools and a tiny camera through a patient's natural orifice (generally the mouth, vagina, or rectum) to perform surgery. This technique eliminates the skin incisions required for open or laparoscopic surgery and results in less pain and quicker recoveries.

Baystate was the first hospital in New England to offer NOTES® procedures, and over the past year, Baystate surgeons have removed four gallbladders transvaginally with this advanced surgical and gastroenterological approach.

This new procedure offers advantages over traditional, open procedures

To perform this procedure, called a transvaginal cholecystectomy, the surgeon passes an endoscope (basically a small tube with a camera) through the patient's vagina and enters the abdomen behind the uterus. Tiny surgical tools are threaded through the endoscope, allowing the surgeon to remove the gallbladder through the vagina. The surgeon then closes the opening in the vagina.

This technique eliminates the biggest downside to abdominal surgery, says Dr. John Romanelli, director of Bariatric Surgery at Baystate, "which is the abdominal incision itself."

"This new procedure offers advantages over traditional, open procedures," says Dr. David Desilets, Baystate's chief of

Gastroenterology. "You eliminate the potential for abdominal wall incisional hernias, and there is limited risk of infection. Plus, there's no scarring, less pain, and a shorter recovery."

The idea is not completely new. Dr. Oz Harmanli, Baystate's chief of Urogynecology and Pelvic Reconstruction Surgery, notes that most of the hysterectomies he performs have long been through the vagina, with no external incision.

"Transvaginal hysterectomy with standard surgical instruments is a very established surgical method; it's not brand new," he says, "and it is considered superior to all other hysterectomy approaches. However, transvaginal abdominal surgery is new and exciting."

According to Dr. David Earle, director of Minimally Invasive Surgery at Baystate, NOTES® is just beginning to emerge as an alternative to more traditional surgeries. In fact, he says that because NOTES® is so new, a track record of positive results has not yet been developed. That is why Baystate is participating in a study funded by the Natural Orifice Surgery Consortium for Assessment and Research NOSCAR®, the first in the world to try to determine if transvaginal NOTES® gallbladder removal offers cosmetic, pain, recovery, and quality of life benefits over laparoscopic cholecystectomy.

As NOTES® continues to be explored—only around 100 of the procedures have been done in the United States so far—the potential applications are many. "NOTES® might also someday be used to remove the spleen or appendix, or to repair the colon, kidneys, or other solid organs," says Dr. Romanelli. "By bringing together experts from a variety of disciplines, such as surgery, gastroenterology, and gynecology, we are really able to maximize the benefits for our patients."

For more information, call Baystate Surgical Associates at 413-794-7020 or visit baystatehealth.org/mis.