

LOCAL

Less invasive hysterectomy available in Savannah

A supracervical hysterectomy removes only the uterus whereas the total hysterectomy removes the uterus and cervix.

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A single parent of two, Lisa Ruffo postponed having a total hysterectomy for years because she didn't have time for lengthy recovery and feared possible side effects.

Then the 42-year-old kindergarten teacher learned that Dr. Greg Whitaker and Dr. Barry Schlafstein in Savannah had begun offering a less drastic hysterectomy.

It's called a supracervical hysterectomy, which removes only the uterus. Whereas the total hysterectomy removes the uterus and cervix.

Studies show the supracervical hysterectomy may allow a faster recovery, shorter hospital stay, less scarring and reduced risk of postoperative problems.

Like many women, Ruffo had long suffered severe periods. Her problems included severe clotting, cramping and fibroids — common non-cancerous growths in the uterus. About one-third of the 600,000 hysterectomies performed in the United States each year are due to fibroids.

So Ruffo underwent the newly offered, less radical hysterectomy in May with three tiny incisions in her lower abdomen. She recovered in two weeks, a shorter period than she feels she would have had with a total hysterectomy.

"I just feel so much better," Ruffo said. "If you have to have it done so you feel better, this is by far the better route to take."

In addition to allowing for a more speedy recovery, the supracervical hysterectomy maintains the pelvic support that is there.

if the support is already good. It's usually done laparoscopically, a surgical technique that requires a handful of small incisions instead of one big one.

But not every patient is a candidate for a supracervical hysterectomy.

"You have to good existing cervical and vaginal pelvic support, and a history of clear Pap smears," Schlafstein said.

In other words, patients must have no clear-cut sign or risk of cervical cancer. Obviously, removing the cervix reduces the threat of cervical cancer.

Studies show that preserving the cervix may play a role in preserving urinary, bowel and sexual activity, functions more often affected by a total hysterectomy.

Drawbacks of the supracervical hysterectomy include the risk of requiring further surgery to remove the cervix if problems arise; still needing to have regular Pap smears; possibly experiencing light periods or spotting.

The supracervical hysterectomy

was the norm in America in the 1940s and 1950s before cervical cancer screenings such as Pap smears, so removing the cervix seemed advantageous.

Now it has returned as one more, less invasive option a woman should consider before deciding to undergo a total hysterectomy.

Hysterectomies are second to cesareans as the most common surgical procedure performed in the United States.

Unnecessary hysterectomies are performed regularly nationwide, often provoking insurance companies to require a second opinion before giving approval. News-Medical.Net reports. Research indicates that 90 percent are elective surgery or surgery performed by choice and not as a lifesaving procedure.

The supracervical hysterectomy is also offered by Dr. Kyrin Dunston at Womancare Obstetrics & Gynecology in Savannah.

Having the less invasive surgery now available in Savannah means more doctors may begin

ALTERNATIVES TO A TOTAL HYSTERECTOMY

A supracervical hysterectomy is used to remove the uterus while sparing the cervix. Women may be able to have a supracervical procedure if there is no reason to have the cervix removed.

Whereas in a total abdominal hysterectomy, the most common type of hysterectomy, the uterus, including the cervix, is removed.

Approximately one-third of all hysterectomies performed in the United States each year are due to fibroids, common non-cancerous growths in the uterus, News-Medical.Net reports..

In addition to supracervical hysterectomies, another alternative to a total hysterectomy for patients with uterine fibroids is uterine fibroid embolization, also called uterine artery embolization.

It's a non-surgical procedure that blocks the arteries that supply blood to the fibroids.

telling patients about the option.

That's important, women health advocates say, because the majority of hysterectomies involve removing the cervix, even when the less radical procedure may be appropriate.

In a survey of nearly 800 gynecologists in the Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C., area, researchers from Georgetown University Medical Center found

nearly 50 percent acknowledged routinely performing a more dramatic form of hysterectomy than may be medically necessary.

The study, published in the August 2003 issue of *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, found that more than 60 percent of doctors said they didn't give their patients the option of considering the choice that would keep the cervix intact.