

A Cut Above the Rest

Single-incision da Vinci hysterectomy means even *quicker recovery, no scar*

BY JOHN BERGGREN

By now, most women have heard of da Vinci robot-assisted hysterectomies, and more than 600 patients from north central Kansas who have had the surgery performed at Salina Regional Health Center can tell you firsthand about the quick recovery benefits the technology provides.

Earlier this year, Salina Regional added some of the latest upgrades to its da Vinci Surgical System and now offers single-site hysterectomies performed through one incision about an inch long through the belly button. The technology was given approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2013.

Previously, da Vinci hysterectomies could only be performed through three or four small incisions, each about a half inch or smaller, at various locations on the abdomen. Since the single-site surgery is tucked inside the belly button, virtually no scar is visible following the procedure.

► SURGICAL SOLUTION

Sonia Rivas, 41, of Salina, had no idea what was ailing her this summer when she went to Salina Regional's emergency department with severe abdominal pain. Doctors determined the cause to be a cyst on one of her ovaries that had burst.

Rivas followed up with her obstetrician-gynecologist, Merle "Boo" Hodges, MD, at Salina Women's Clinic, who laid out the scenarios for her: The diseased ovary would likely continue

to cause her pain without removal; fibroids on her uterus, which Hodges had been monitoring since her last pregnancy, appeared to be getting larger; and heavy menstrual cycles, which had always plagued her, and were exacerbated by a bleeding condition called Von Willebrand disease that sometimes left her anemic, would likely continue to cause her problems in the future.

The solution was easy—remove the diseased ovary and have a hysterectomy at the same time to save additional problems down the road. She was a perfect candidate for the new single-site da Vinci surgery.

"I'd heard of da Vinci surgery, but I really wasn't familiar with what it involved, and I had no idea there was a new way to do it through one small incision," Rivas says. "It seemed like the perfect solution for me. With my bleeding

disorder, less trauma and less blood loss especially made sense. I knew I was done having children, so that wasn't a concern."

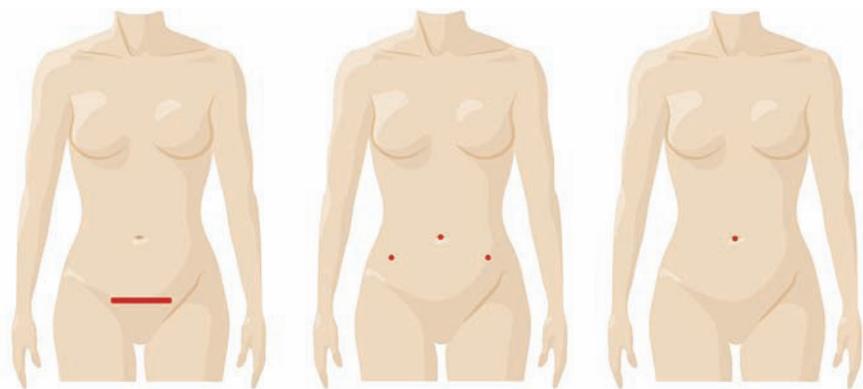
With four children at home, a quick recovery was important. Rivas spent one night in the hospital following surgery as a precaution for her bleeding condition.

"I couldn't tell how big the incision was because I couldn't see it inside my belly button," Rivas says. "I felt a little soreness in my abdomen at first—kind of like the way I felt after childbirth. It was nothing bad and that went away in a day or two. After that I had to remind myself that I'd had surgery."

Rivas did feel tired for a week after her surgery, but she credits that more to symptoms associated with her bleeding condition than the surgery itself.

"I'm used to being anemic from time to time, and this kind of felt the same," Rivas says. "Without the monthly menstrual cycles, doctors think most of these problems will go away."

Rivas returned to work two weeks after surgery in the customer service department at Salina Vortex, starting with half days. After a



From left, an illustration depicting incision sites for traditional open hysterectomy, multisite da Vinci hysterectomy and the new single-site hysterectomy.

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Sonia Rivas spends time with her kids at the park just three weeks after a single-site da Vinci hysterectomy. She was one of the first to undergo the upgraded procedure in Salina.

week of part-time work, everything was back to normal.

"The hardest part was following doctor's orders to not carry my 9-month-old and telling my 3-year-old he couldn't climb on mommy's tummy for a week after surgery," Rivas says. "We managed through that short time. I'm just glad Salina has this technology and I could get this option, with the shortest possible recovery."

► **MANY WOMEN WILL BENEFIT**

While setup for a single-site procedure is technically more difficult for the surgeon, once the instrumentation has been placed inside the patient, the operation is similar to multisite da Vinci hysterectomies.

"Women who have an abdominal wall thicker than 4 inches are not candidates for the new single-site surgery because of limitations with the instruments we currently have," Hodges says. "But I have a feeling that in the future there will be additional upgrades that will allow us to operate on larger patients. It's just amazing how fast all of this technology is evolving."

With even less scarring than multisite da Vinci hysterectomies, it's hard to imagine what could be left to improve with the surgery.

"Women have come from all over north central Kansas specifically for Salina's da Vinci hysterectomies," Hodges says. "Less pain, less blood loss, shorter hospital stays and quicker recovery times appeal to everyone. Simply, if you need a hysterectomy, this is just the way to do it today."