

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Media Contact: Morgan Lyons
(214) 648-3404
or e-mail: MLyons@mednet.swmed.edu

SURGICAL TECHNIQUE JUST THE RIGHT SIZE FOR CHILDREN

DALLAS — November 8, 1995 — Pediatric surgeons at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas are taking laparoscopy and other minimally invasive surgical techniques to a smaller population — pediatric and neonatal patients.

Surgeons use laparoscopy to treat adults for many gastrointestinal illnesses, achieving comparable results with shorter recovery times and less scarring than traditional surgical procedures. Traditional procedures require the body be opened to allow the surgeon to observe and operate directly on a patient. In laparoscopy, surgeons make small incisions and observe the affected area through a laparoscope.

"The benefits to adult patients are obvious. We began advancing laparoscopic techniques because we felt children should receive those benefits as well. There is no compelling reason not to," said Dr. W. Raleigh Thompson, assistant professor of surgery at UT Southwestern. Thompson has performed a number of laparoscopic procedures on children, including an increasing number of appendectomies.

While removing the appendix is the appropriate treatment for appendicitis, Thompson said diagnosing the painful condition isn't always easy. Sometimes it is necessary to look inside the body. "Laparoscopy allows us to make tiny incisions and get a direct view of the appendix. Then, if appendicitis is present, we can remove it through the small incisions." That way, Thompson added, the patient is left with very small scars compared to the one left by the abdominal incision needed by a traditional appendectomy.

Thompson said there are several other instances where minimally invasive surgery is just as effective as the traditional open approach. Using the laparoscopic approach to reshape

(MORE)

SURGICAL TECHNIQUE — 2

a child's stomach offers a number of advantages over the traditional technique. The surgical procedure, known as a Nissen fundoplication, is used to help children who have trouble digesting food. Children with neurological problems are particularly prone to a condition that causes them to regurgitate stomach contents up the esophagus and often into their lungs. These children often face problems with malnutrition.

Thompson said the laparoscopic procedure tends to cause less pain and helps the patient recover more quickly from the surgery. His research has found there are fewer complications, such as pneumonia, from a laparoscopic procedure than a traditional technique.

"It's also been our experience that the procedure can be effectively used on very small children, say under 10 pounds," he said. That makes it possible for surgeons to intervene early in the child's development before other complications arise from the illness.

###