

Health Reach

YOUR RESOURCE FOR WELLNESS

KNOWING WHO TO TRUST WHEN YOU HAVE BREAST CANCER

Being diagnosed with breast cancer is emotionally and physically draining. For many patients, that stress is compounded by confusion over where to seek treatment and whom to entrust with their care.

Wouldn't it be nice if there were a third-party rating system using clear, evidence-based criteria to identify the best centers across the U.S.?

"It's particularly impressive that the Center for Breast Health at Virginia Hospital Center is one of the first in the country to be recognized by the National Cancer Institute as a Comprehensive Breast Cancer Center."

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INVISIBLE SURGERY

Most abdominal surgeries performed by Surgical Associates at Virginia Hospital Center are done laparoscopically, requiring only three or four tiny incisions. And for some patients, there's an option that is even less invasive.

With single incision laparoscopic surgery (SILS), an entire organ can be removed through one tiny incision in the belly button. Used primarily in cases of appendicitis or gall bladder disease, the procedure has a recovery time equal to conventional laparoscopy and may result in even less post-operative pain. Patients are usually able to leave the hospital the same day and return to work within five days.

"The biggest advantage of all is cosmetic," says surgeon J.R. Salameh, MD, FACS. "Instead of the traditional four incisions, we can now take out the gallbladder through only one incision hidden in the navel, leaving no visible scars. You can't tell they've had anything done. Laparoscopy was a huge step and now this is another step forward."

As a new technique, SILS is now used in limited applications, but will likely expand to other kinds of surgeries, such as anti-reflux procedures and weight loss

surgeries. "We try to always be cutting-edge pioneers where there are clear advantages for our patients," Dr. Salameh says. "Laparoscopy made the idea of surgery less frightening for patients, and now SILS is making surgery even more acceptable. Patients commonly found excuses not to have procedures done, but that's happening less often as our approaches become less invasive."

Tanika Williams underwent SILS in March and was pleasantly surprised by the results. "I had never had a surgery before and was nervous. I was scared to take off the bandage afterward, but found nothing more than a little scab. Now you can't tell I ever had surgery," says the 34-year-old Alexandria resident. "I'm ready for bathing suit season already!"

Individuals who have advanced organ disease, are morbidly obese, or have had previous abdominal surgeries may not be candidates for SILS, but may still qualify for conventional laparoscopy.

For more information, contact Surgical Associates at Virginia Hospital Center at 703.717.4250 or visit www.surgicalassociatesvhc.com. ■