

A speedy recovery

Robotics in the operating room

Lorena Harger, 31, and her husband, Allen, married for almost three years, were excited to start a family. The couple was having trouble conceiving, but were told to continue trying. They would soon learn of an underlying reason for the troubles they experienced.

Lorena and Allen were vacationing in her native country, Colombia, when doctors discovered a baseball-sized fibroid, a noncancerous cell growth, in her uterus. Doctors believe this growth could have been a contributing factor to Lorena and Allen's trouble conceiving.

Back in the United States, Lorena visited with doctors to discuss her treatment options. The Hargers were told Lorena's fibroid would have to be removed surgically if they ever hoped to have children.

Patients are offered several choices for gynecological surgeries, like Lorena's fibroid removal. Most patients prefer the minimally invasive operations, which typically require less recovery. A da Vinci robot-assisted surgery allows for a shorter

hospital stay, faster recovery because of smaller incisions, less pain and scarring, and a quicker return to normal activities.

After much research, Lorena decided to have her doctor use the da Vinci surgical system for her operation. "It was a recommendation to get the robotic surgery, but I was given other options," said Lorena. "Dr. Zhang and Dr. Driscoll thought using robotics would be the best option because the fibroid was larger, and they wanted to minimize blood loss and make the operation quicker."

"If we can provide patients with options, educate them on their choices, make a recommendation and then allow patients to choose – everyone wins because we are empowering them," said Sunny Zhang, MD, PhD, OB-GYN Associates, P.C.

The surgery

"The da Vinci provides surgeons several advantages over traditional minimally invasive surgery," said Alvina Driscoll, MD, OB-GYN Associates, P.C. "It has 3D vision of the operative field, which gives the surgeon better depth perception and magnification. It also has jointed-wrist

instruments, which allow the surgeon a 360 degree range of motion."

da Vinci surgery allows surgeons to operate on more complicated cases. It also assists surgeons when performing some of the more delicate surgeries, like Lorena's fibroid removal.

"If the instruments and technology are available for robotic surgery, I think utilizing them is the best option," said Allen. "There is a lot of opportunity for human error and a small mistake on a surgery like Lorena's could have caused a lot of problems."

During the da Vinci procedure, two surgeons are present in the operating room. One is seated at a special console, operating the robot's hands and performing the surgery. The other surgeon is a few feet away with the patient allowing for communication between both doctors during the procedure.

"Before we had robotics we performed this procedure abdominally and as a result, the patient stayed in the hospital for several days," said Zhang. "With the da Vinci procedure, patients resume normal activity faster."



Alvina Driscoll, MD
OB-GYN Associates, P.C.



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Allen and Lorena Harger browse through their wedding album in their Cedar Rapids home.

The recovery

“I was really scared before my surgery because it was my first,” said Lorena. “I’m happy with my decision to choose robotic surgery because I didn’t feel a lot of pain and everything turned out really well.” Lorena spent four days recovering in a private suite.

One of the main advantages of the da Vinci procedure is the speedy recovery time. It takes most patients only three or four weeks for a full recovery versus six weeks or more with traditional surgery.

“The doctors told me it would take two weeks to get back to basic activities and after a month I was ready to do anything,” said Lorena. “I was excited to get back to dancing. I like to play my music really loud at home and dance the salsa and merengue.”

Another advantage of robotic surgery for the Hagers is the option to still have children.

“They said Lorena should be physically able to have children,” Allen said with a smile. “We would love to have two, but we will take whatever we can get.”

■ **To learn more about da Vinci surgery, log on to www.stlukescr.org to watch a robotic surgery video, listen to our experts or hear other patient testimonials.**