

6 Points on How Endoscopic Technology Can Transform Spine Surgery

Written by Laura Miller
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Laser Spine Institute Medical Director Michael W. Perry, MD, spine surgeon Vernon Morris, MD, and Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives John Polikandriotis recently published a case study on successful endoscopic spine surgery for a patient with spondylolisthesis in the *Journal of Musculoskeletal Medicine*

. Dr. Perry and Dr. Morris discuss six points on the benefits of the procedure and how it's changing the way medical professionals approach spine surgery.

1. It's an outpatient procedure. The endoscopic spine surgery that Tampa, Fla.-based Laser Spine Institute surgeons perform is an outpatient surgery. Patients undergo local anesthetic and deep intravenous sedation for the minimal incision procedure, and after surgery they are able to leave the clinic without an overnight stay, which is customary for traditional open spine surgeries performed in hospitals. "This procedure will greatly expedite the care of patients with cervical and lumbar problems who need surgery," says Dr. Perry. "There are a million spine operations done in this country every year, and about 90 percent of them are done in a hospital setting. However, the process can all be streamlined, which means a comfortable surgery and a shorter recovery period. This is a giant step forward for patients with spine problems."

2. There is less time spent in recovery and rehabilitation. The smaller incision has several advantages for the patient, including a smaller scar and less blood loss during the procedure. Traditionally, patients undergoing open spine procedures run the risk of needing a blood transfusion because of the high amount of blood lost. The decreased blood loss, coupled with the local anesthetic and deep intravenous sedation, allows patients to begin moving quicker after surgery. The sooner patients are up and moving after the procedure, the quicker the recovery period will be.

3. Patients with comorbidities are candidates for the procedure. Spondylolisthesis and other degenerative conditions are common among patients across the country, but many of them aren't candidates for traditional open surgical correction because they have comorbidities that would make undergoing the procedure too risky. However, the minimally invasive nature of endoscopic spine surgery means surgeons can safely perform it on patients with comorbidities who otherwise wouldn't receive surgical treatment. "Traditional surgeons don't feel moved to place patients with high morbidities through large operations whereas we can, by comparison, easily help them on an outpatient basis," says Dr. Morris. "This technology greatly increases the indications for spine surgery and we can reach a greater population of patients from around the country."

4. Lowering the cost of spine care. The endoscopic spine surgery is less costly than conventional procedures because it can be done in an outpatient setting instead of a hospital, doesn't require an overnight stay and there aren't any implants associated with it. "The fusion, hardware and disc replacements associated with other procedures are expensive," says Dr. Perry. "Our procedure can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars less than open procedures. It's win-win for insurance companies and patients."

The economic and societal expenses tied to spine surgery are also lower among patients who receive endoscopic spine surgery because they can return to work quicker than patients undergoing other types of procedures. Laser Spine Institute patients regularly return to

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restricted work within 4-6 weeks and are back to full activity in 12 weeks.

5. Training to perform the procedure. The minimally invasive procedure is much different for surgeons to perform because the incision is so small. Spine surgeons must take time out of their regular practice to train on the equipment that allows minimally invasive access to the patient's spine. "It's a steep learning curve," says Dr. Morris. "You can't just do one or two a month and become good at it. At Laser Spine Institute, we perform these procedures day in and day out which is why we are excellent at what we do."

He has performed approximately 3,000 of these surgeries. At first, it took him between two and three hours to finish, but now he can perform the entire surgery in about 45 minutes.

6. Promoting evidence-based medicine. In addition to publishing case studies on the procedures they perform, Laser Spine Institute surgeons would like to conduct clinical studies to show the procedure is effective after a significant follow-up period. "These procedures can be extremely beneficial, and getting that out into the medical community will be very important not only for Laser Spine Institute, but for the medical community in general," says Dr. Perry. He would also like to publish further case studies on minimally invasive solutions for facet ablations, spinal degeneration and cervical spine conditions.

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