

Program offers alternatives to hysterectomy

By Rebeca Kuropatwa

Dr Richard Boroditsky has spearheaded a new program to give women effective options as alternatives to hysterectomies.

According to Boroditsky, who is the medical director, Mature Women's Centre, hysterectomies are procedures that happen all too often and are often unnecessary.

The program called "HALt" (Hysterectomies Alternatives Program) is managed by Shauna Leeson, a nurse clinician who has been working for the Mature Women's Centre since 2004.

In 2007, the Mature Women's Centre came over to the Victoria General Hospital, which is when the HALt program was founded.

"We currently have three physicians working in HALt," said Leeson, noting those physicians are Richard Boroditsky, his son, Michael Boroditsky, and Carrie Palatnik.

"The women are often referred by their family physician. The majority are in the age range of 30-55, women with heavy or painful periods, to improve quality of life. We also see women in the post-menopausal stage. The majority of the patients we see here are in the benign situation".

"Too many women are being told they have only two choices – they can do nothing or they can have their uterus removed"

"We see about 20 new patients per month in the program. We're here to give them other options to hysterectomy and we do this as we understand the consequences of having one."

"If a women who is, generally in her 40s or 50s, is going to have a hysterectomy, she's going to need to take six to eight weeks or up to three or four months off work and her regular duties – where often it can be treated with medication or other alternatives, which have less risks"

According to Boroditsky, "We have one of the highest hysterectomy rates in Canada (with some 2300 hysterectomies per year in Manitoba).

"Traditionally, the main reason for doing about 70 percent of hysterectomies has been abnormal uterine bleeding. Before we had some of the newer alternative hysterectomy technology, there wasn't much we could offer women.

"One of the most common conditions we're seeing associated with abnormal uterine bleeding is a condition called "uterine fibroids" (benign lumps in the uterus). We used to believe this meant women in this situation automatically needed a hysterectomy."

“Hysterectomy is a major operation with major complications (including risks of going under general or spinal anaesthesia, haemorrhaging, infection, and damage of organs around the uterus [like the bowel, bladder, etc]).

“With these serious, major complications that can occur, we shouldn’t be taking hysterectomies lightly.

“We can’t look at hysterectomies as the ultimate treatment for uterine bleeding. It shouldn’t be the first choice. It should only enter into the picture after you’ve tried all other available alternatives.”

Boroditsky admits he has probably done at least as many if not more hysterectomies than other physicians, in the past, but that pattern has changed. “I’ve gone the other way,” he said. “I now believe hysterectomies should be only a last resort.

“One particular study was done about eight or nine years ago in the States they adjudicated thousands hysterectomies for benign reasons after the fact. They found that some 80 percent of these hysterectomies could have been treated or managed with other alternatives.

“In Europe, alternatives to hysterectomies are more accepted by both the doctors and the patients. In Canada, many women and even doctors are not aware of alternative options.

“There is increased cost to doing a hysterectomy than there is for the alternatives – cost to the system, physical and psychological cost to the woman and to her family.

“The only way we can make an effective diagnoses is to look inside the uterus (hysteroscopy). Once you make the diagnosis, there are many alternatives for treatment, depending on each individual case, whether that’s with pills, a device, or otherwise.

“To my understanding, in Judaism, the uterus is looked at as an organ of reproduction, and the most important thing is the mother’s health and her ability to look after the family.”

On the HAlt website, it states, “In Canada, hysterectomies are the most common surgical procedure performed on women. Each year, over 60,000 of these major surgeries are performed and it’s believed that more than 60 percent of hysterectomies may have been avoided with the use of alternate procedures. The HAlt program is designed to offer women alternatives to hysterectomy when faced with abnormal uterine bleeding and fibroid tumors.

“Due to the risks associated with major surgery as well as the negative effects hysterectomy can have on a woman’s self esteem, their sexual experience, and perceived desirability, women are seeking alternative treatments to fibroids and uterine bleeding.

“The HAlt program aims to provide women with information and awareness of options,

including the use of medical alternatives to control bleeding, minimally invasive surgery, and other less invasive techniques.

For more information, visit <http://www.more.com/health/wellness/endangered-uterus>, www.maturewomenscentre.ca, <http://www.vgh.mb.ca/mwc/index.html>, and/
<http://www.vgh.mb.ca/mwc/halt.html>.