

FALL 2014

# JOURNEYS

*"Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice ..."* – William Jennings Bryan

Bryan  Health

*Surgical pioneer  
introduces  
innovations*



# Surgical innovation flourishes in Lincoln

*Gene Stohs, MD, is one of the pioneers in endoscopic surgery. Some of his long-time team at Bryan Medical Center include Heather Ware, RN, (left), Becky Marshall, RN, and surgical techs Barb Fricke and Christy Krejdl.*

**Endoscopic surgery is a minimally invasive surgical approach in which an endoscope (a thin tube with a small camera) is placed inside a patient, either through a small incision or through a natural opening such as the nostril, to allow physicians to look at and operate on tissues within the body. In this edition of Journeys, Lincoln surgeons who were early innovators and national leaders in endoscopic surgery share their stories.**

**F**or more than 25 years, Gene Stohs, MD, has been a pioneer of laparoscopic obstetric and gynecologic surgical techniques in the Midwest and on the world stage.

“Laparoscopic surgery is the term we use to describe endoscopic surgery performed within the abdomen, and it is a technique that gained momentum first in community hospitals rather than in medical centers,” notes Dr. Stohs. “In Lincoln, my partner Dr. Palmer Johnson and I foresaw that laparoscopy would be a dominant player in ob/gyn surgery long before surgeons in many other parts of the country. This is an example of physicians in private practice taking the technical lead for the benefit of patients, and we went on to do important work in the field.”

“For example, we performed the first video camera surgery in Lincoln in 1988 and the first laparoscopically assisted vaginal hysterectomy in Nebraska in 1991. This is important because the

## SURGICAL PIONEERS

'gold standard' for hysterectomies (removal of the uterus and/or Fallopian tubes and ovaries) is the vaginal approach, which is done to avoid the large abdomen incisions performed during abdominal hysterectomies. The role of the laparoscope is therefore to allow vaginal hysterectomies rather than abdominal hysterectomies as often as possible."

Dr. Stohs also was among the first in the world to successfully operate on pregnant patients laparoscopically.

### *Local team led the way*

"So we were able to do some pioneering work right here at Lincoln General Hospital (now Bryan Medical Center)," he continues, "with a

## Endoscopic procedures offer substantial advantages

Endoscopic surgeries, which have been performed successfully by Lincoln physicians for more than two decades, offer these advantages over traditional long-incision surgeries:

- Lower rates of pneumonia and other postsurgical infections.
- Less visible scarring.
- Less blood loss.
- Faster recovery period and quicker return to work.
- Less postoperative pain, requiring less frequent use of narcotic painkillers.

wonderful operating room staff and scrub nurses, many of whom have been with us the entire time. And as we expected, other endoscopic disciplines eventually joined this effort throughout the world to the point that laparoscopic surgery has become more mainstream."

### *Sharing success stories*

Over the years, Dr. Stohs has presented 60 lectures on laparoscopy and ob/gyn surgical techniques across the United States and Canada. Three of his videos were recognized as among the best at International Film Festivals of the American Association of Gynecologic Laparoscopists.

"Today, community hospitals often have very experienced surgeons and staff working in the

**Surgical techs Barb Fricke (left) and Cindy Strehle (far right) assist Gene Stohs, MD, and Jeffrey Tomjack, MD, of Gynecologic Surgeons and Obstetricians during a laparoscopic procedure at Bryan West Campus.**



endoscopic arena,” says Dr. Stohs. “The range of surgical procedures being done endoscopically at Bryan is quite diverse, and it is important for people in the community to be aware of this because it means they don’t need to leave town to receive the obvious benefits of endoscopic surgery, and they can recover near their homes and families.”

According to Dr. Stohs, past chief of staff and former Bryan Medical Center Board chairman, other endoscopic procedures being performed in obstetrics and gynecology include treatment of tubal pregnancies, ovarian cysts and uterine fibroids, removal of pelvic and ovarian endometriosis and release of scar tissue or adhesions that develop within the abdomen.

Other surgical disciplines performing endoscopic procedures at Bryan include general surgery, otolaryngology (ear, nose and throat surgery), neurosurgery, orthopedic surgery and bariatric (weight loss) surgery.

### Looking to future

“Because of the obvious concern and debate right now about lowering health care costs, the future of laparoscopic surgery lies in minimizing expenses while maximizing patient results; that is, fewer complications, less operating time and using fewer disposable instruments and other unnecessarily expensive technologies,” Dr. Stohs says.

“Less has to be the new more!” ■

## Patient who traveled from Europe recounts her successful care



*Tatiana Ungar is thankful for pioneering care she received in Lincoln 15 years ago.*

“My name is Tatiana Ungar. I am 68 years old and was born in Siberia. My family now lives in Moldova, a beautiful, eastern European country between Romania and Ukraine.

“I had laparoscopic surgery performed by Dr. Gene Stohs in 1999 to remove a uterine fibroid that had for many years caused me chronic bleeding, anemia, fatigue, irregular heartbeat, chest pain, dizziness and hypertension. In 1998, I experienced bleeding so severe that I nearly bled to death in a hospital in Moldova.

I first met with Dr. Stohs when I visited my daughter, Svetlana, who was then living in Lincoln, studying English and earning her bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. Dr. Stohs recommended a hysterectomy to remove the uterine fibroid, as this would stop the chronic bleeding and solve my related medical problems. Dr. Stohs explained that the hysterectomy could be done laparoscopically to avoid leaving a big scar, and it would shorten my recovery time.

“As it turned out, however, laparoscopic hysterectomies were not being performed in Moldova then — doctors were only performing so-called ‘open abdominal hysterectomies,’ which require a 5- to 7-inch incision across the abdomen. So, six months later, I

returned to Lincoln to have my surgery done laparoscopically by Dr. Stohs. By that time, I needed the surgery urgently, as my health had deteriorated because of chronic blood loss.

“My surgery took twice as long as expected — about two hours — because the fibroid had grown to the size of a grapefruit since my previous visit. However, the surgery went well, and Dr. Stohs said I should recover quickly.

“I required some pain medication, which was typical, and two days after my surgery I left the hospital to finish my recovery at my daughter’s home. I visited Dr. Stohs’ office before returning to Moldova to make sure I was healing well and that it was OK to fly back. Overall, I felt so relieved after my surgery, and I healed quickly, as Dr. Stohs had predicted.

“That was 15 years ago. Now every time I visit my daughter in Nebraska, I go to Dr. Stohs for a checkup, and so far, everything is fantastic. The chronic bleeding and related problems are gone, and I feel full of energy, run my own business, and look younger than my age.

“To me, Dr. Stohs is a savior. The surgery he performed literally saved my life, and I am so indebted to him for what he was able to do for me 15 years ago. I feel so fortunate to have found him, because he is both an expert in his field and a considerate, thoughtful, intelligent and kind doctor. The laparoscopic surgery he performed greatly improved my quality of life and gave me a chance to see my grandchildren grow up. I also want to thank the staff at Bryan for their professionalism, kindness and caring before and after my surgery.” ■

*To learn how you can support Bryan Health, contact the Bryan Foundation at 402-481-8605. For information about laparoscopic obstetric and gynecologic surgery, contact Dr. Gene Stohs at 402-421-8581.*