



After suffering with Crohn's disease since childhood, Michael Vassolo sought the newest treatments. Although Vassolo had major surgery previously, physicians at Weiss Hospital were able to perform a new minimally invasive surgical technique. Vassolo says, "My surgery turned out perfectly. I'm grateful for this procedure; it saved me from a lot of mental and physical pain." Vassolo is left with only several small scars.

Laparoscopic Surgery: New Option for Crohn's Disease

Many advances are being made at the University of Chicago Hospitals in the treatment of Crohn's disease, a chronic digestive disorder. Crohn's disease affects the lower part of the small intestine, the colon, and other parts of the digestive tract. Symptoms may include persistent diarrhea, abdominal pain, rectal bleeding, fever, weight loss, and skin or eye irritations. In children, Crohn's can cause delays in growth and sexual maturation.

The disorder is incurable. However, advances in medications and surgical techniques are helping patients control Crohn's and return to normal lives. Constantine Frantzides, MD, a U of C surgeon and medical director of the Minimally Invasive Surgery Center at Weiss Memorial Hospital, is using minimally invasive ("laparoscopic") procedures for some patients with Crohn's disease, with great success. "Not all Crohn's patients are candidates for this surgery," says Dr. Frantzides. "But for some people who don't have a lot of adhesions and scar tissue from previous surgeries, this minimally invasive technique is a good option."

Michael Goldberg, MD, a U of C gastroenterologist at Weiss, adds that

this newer surgery is also a good choice for people who don't respond well to medications. "Minimally invasive surgery, possibly coupled with medical management following the procedure, decreases the chances of recurrence of Crohn's," says Dr. Goldberg. Minimally invasive surgery offers key advantages: a much smaller incision, shorter hospital stay and faster recovery.

Michael Vassolo had this procedure performed in January. Because Vassolo had previous surgeries, Dr. Frantzides warned him that the laparoscopic technique might not be effective. Fortunately, Vassolo's previous surgeries had not created much scarring, so Dr. Frantzides proceeded with the minimally invasive procedure. "Doctors I spoke with at other hospitals would only do 'open' procedures," recalls Vassolo.

The U of C Hospitals "have one of the most extensive research centers in the world for inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD) including Crohn's," says Stephen Hanauer, MD, director of the U of C's Logan Center and IBD Research Center. "Our research includes genetic background of IBD, novel therapeutic approaches, and clinical research on risk factors."