

Laparoscope used to relieve ulcer pain

By JOE MANNING

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Wauwatosa — A new technique for severing nerves in the stomach to relieve ulcers has been developed by a Medical College of Wisconsin surgeon and is thought to be the only such treatment involving a laparoscope in the world, the physician said Monday.

A laparoscope, a surgical instrument inserted through the abdominal wall, enables the surgeon to view the organs in the abdomen. Its use in a variety of surgical procedures, from hysterectomies to hernia repair, has been rapidly expanding.

The advantage is that large abdominal incisions can be avoided, replaced by tiny puncture holes through which surgical tools can be inserted.

The ulcer technique has been used on one patient and two others will undergo the procedure soon, said Constantine Frantzides, assistant professor of surgery at the medical school.

The laparoscope is equipped with a tiny television camera enabling Frantzides to direct cutting instruments to sever the

nerve fibers. Once the fibers are severed, the production of excess stomach acid is stopped, Frantzides said, leading to control of the ulcers.

Severing the nerves on the front and back of the stomach is a commonly used procedure called a vagotomy. Traditionally, a large abdominal incision was made to reach the stomach to sever the fibers of the vagus nerve controlling the production of acid.

Frantzides said that because the vagus nerve is important in controlling more than just stomach acid, only portions of the nerve fibers are severed.

He said surgeons were reluctant to perform the open-abdominal operation on gastric ulcer patients because of size of the surgical wound and the necessity of an 8-to-12 day hospital stay followed by a 4-to-6 week period of recuperation.

The first laparoscope operation was performed last month on a 47-year-old Milwaukee woman who suffered from ulcer disease for years, despite medication. She returned to work in five days, he said.

"It takes care of the problem (ulcers) forever," Frantzides said.