

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

Former patient
now matches
others with
robotic
surgery



Pain tends to have very bad timing. At age 27, Elizabeth Carpenter was married, working, going to school, all while trying to keep up with her three-year-old. Not

a lot of time for endometriosis. A fairly common female disorder in which cells from the lining of the uterus grow in other areas of the body, it can bring with it a host of symptoms, like heavy cycles, fatigue, and a fair dose of pain.

When pain medications aren't enough, a hysterectomy is often a viable solution. She and her husband, Jon, were done having children, but a long recovery time was even more bad timing. So her doctor suggested a robotic hysterectomy, performed on the da Vinci robotic surgical system. As a nurse at Liberty Hospital at the time, she was familiar with the system but was shocked to learn how quick recovery could be.

"For me, it was a no-brainer," she said.

Traditional open hysterectomy surgery requires a large incision and can mean significant pain and a long recovery process. The da Vinci method uses only tiny, dime-sized incisions to access the uterus. This allowed Ward Ohlhausen, MD, an obstetrician/gynecologist at the hospital, to perform the surgery with greater precision and control, minimize pain, and speed up Carpenter's recovery.

After just one night in the hospital, she was home the next day.

"I tell people this still to this day that I never had any pain," she said. "After four days, I went to a July 4th celebration, shooting off fireworks. I wasn't running around, but I was feeling fine. A week after that, we went on a planned family vacation."

Today, she still espouses the benefits of the da Vinci system each day on the job. After finishing her master's, she now works as a nurse practitioner at Urology Specialists, PC, working with men and women who suffer from incontinence, pelvic pain, kidney stones, erectile dysfunction and many other conditions.



appropriate doctor," she said.

Having firsthand experience, she helps demystify the process.

"When people hear the word 'robot,' they're kind of, 'There's going to be a robot operating on me?' I think for patients...it's a 'scare' thing. But, you know, if you educate people, go over the risks and benefits, and make sure they can make an informed consent for what they want, then we obviously are 100-percent supportive of it."

Plus, as the only female urology provider in the Northland, she is in a unique position.

"I'm a woman, and it's easier to talk to a woman about female issues," she said. "Especially when talking to a female patient, I can kind of bring down the scare. I've done it myself. It can be frightening anytime you're going into surgery, but we have the experience, which I think makes it a lot easier for them."

"I feel really fortunate here, at Liberty Hospital, to have the da Vinci."

Today, Carpenter still stays plenty busy balancing a successful career with her active family, but she is finally enjoying that busy life without pain.

"Looking back, I'm glad I did it...I feel like I'm healthier now than I ever have been. It was a piece of cake."

 For more information about da Vinci robotic surgery at Liberty Hospital, visit www.libertyhospital.org.

LEFT A former robotic-surgery patient herself, Elizabeth Carpenter now helps identify and educate her urology patients on the benefits of da Vinci surgery.