

TECHNOLOGY

Improving Lives

Video-Aided Spine Surgery Means Faster Recovery

(NAPSA)—Like many girls her age, 16-year-old Ashley was concerned with her appearance. So, it was with some concern that Ashley and her mother, Kathy Hardwick, discovered that she had an abnormally curved spine.

"Ashley bent over to get a soda out of the refrigerator and I noticed there was a strange lump at her shoulder," Kathy recalls. "Right away I knew something was wrong, so I took her to a doctor and he told me it was scoliosis."

Kathy brought her daughter to the Shriners Hospital for Children in St. Louis, where the girl had received care for leg problems several years earlier. There she learned that surgery is generally indicated for patients with curves beyond 45 degrees.

Traditional open spine surgery for scoliosis leaves a scar either down the center of the back or along the side of the chest wall. However, a procedure called Video-Assisted Instrumentation and Thoracoscopy now lets a surgery team use minimally invasive techniques similar to those used in some knee and abdominal surgeries.

"We're making three to four one-inch incisions on the chest and doing the surgery using endoscopic techniques and tools that allow us to see inside the chest without actually going inside the chest," said Dr. Lawrence Lenke, chief of spine surgery at St. Louis Shriners Hospital.

Ashley was one of the earliest Shriners' patients to have the endoscopic procedure at St. Louis Shriners Hospital. One week after surgery she headed home and resumed playing volleyball within a year.



A surgical team at the Shriners Hospital in St. Louis uses a video monitor to track progress during spine surgery.

Less-invasive surgery means much less noticeable scars, less blood loss during surgery, and a faster and easier recovery period. Ashley says she had been very pleased with her Shriners Hospital experience.

"Shriners is a great hospital. At the time Ashley needed this surgery, I didn't have a lot of money to pay. Shriners was willing to help without me paying anything at all," said Kathy.

For more information on Shriners' network of 22 hospitals that provide medical care and services totally free of charge to children with orthopaedic problems, burns and spinal cord injuries, write to: Shriners International Headquarters, Public Relations Dept., 2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa, FL 33607, or visit the Web site at www.shrinershq.org. Treatment is provided to children under age 18 without regard to race, religion or relationship to a Shriner.

If you know a child Shriners can help, call 1-800-237-5055 in the United States, or 1-800-361-7256 in Canada.