

Bikini after hysterectomy: Henrico woman calls belly-button surgery ‘a miracle’

By Marilyn J. Shaw

Early last year, Drs. Siobhan Dunnivant and B. Boyden Clary III of OB/GYN Associates watched an online presentation about single-incision laparoscopic hysterectomies as a lark. The physicians soon became converts.

Gaining access at the belly button, through an opening about the size of a man’s thumb, adds another choice for women who need this common major surgery – a method that is a far cry from the hip-to-hip incision in a traditional hysterectomy.

What revolutionizes the umbilical approach is no cutting through abdominal muscle. For the patient, that means less pain, a shorter hospitalization stay and a faster recovery. Traditional hysterectomy patients need six weeks to recuperate.

“It is a miracle,” says Rhonda Jacoby, 46. Clary performed her hysterectomy Dec. 10. Before the end of that month, the athletic Henrico County mother of four was playing basketball in a bikini at a family reunion in San Diego. “Unless I pointed my scar out to you, you wouldn’t be able to tell I had surgery.”

Henrico resident Theresa Eanes, on whom Dunnivant operated, was eager to leave the hospital the next morning. And the best part? “My belly button looks way better than before. Everybody I tell that they took my uterus out through my navel can’t believe it.”

Between May 2009 and mid-February, Dunnivant and Clary performed about 50 of these surgeries, using the single-incision laparoscopic surgery (SILS) method almost exclusively. They figure they must be among the top 15 East Coast physicians in number of cases.

“In this economy, where no one’s investing money in [research and development] ... every company that makes instruments is working on instruments

to facilitate this surgery and advance it,” says Clary, who likens laparoscopic surgery to tying shoes using chopsticks.