

## **Two new surgeries offer advances in the treatment of chronic hip, spine ailments.**

**RUTLAND, VT., May 20, 2008** -- Two orthopaedic surgeons on staff at the Vermont Orthopaedic Clinic (VOC) in Rutland have introduced a pair of innovative surgical procedures that are showing considerable promise in the treatment of chronic hip and spine conditions.

Dr. William Lighthart, a staff surgeon at the clinic specializing in total joint replacement recently performed a newly refined hip resurfacing technique that offers many advantages over traditional hip replacement surgery. And Lighthart's colleague on staff, Dr. Matthew Zmurko, a spine surgeon, has performed a novel new cervical disk replacement surgery that offers hope for patients with cervical radiculopathy resulting from herniated discs.

Both VOC physicians have been instrumental in bringing advanced treatments to their patients since joining the clinic's staff.

### **Hip Resurfacing Technique**

Lighthart received training in an updated hip-shaving and resurfacing surgery with high potential for patients with arthritic hip joints. "It isn't a new procedure," notes Dr. Lighthart, "but the current iteration of it that's been released in this country over the past couple of years is new."

As Lighthart explains, in more conventional hip replacement surgery, the head and neck of the femur—the main bone of the upper thigh—are cut off and replaced with a large cobalt-chromium stem and ball that then sits into a metal cup lining the hip socket. With the new technique, a much smaller section of the femur head is essentially shaved off and resurfaced to accommodate a smaller prosthesis. "This technique just reshapes the femoral head and puts a metal cap on it," Lighthart explains.

Lighthart says that there are several advantages to the new procedure. "It's a metal-on-metal replacement, instead of metal on plastic, which means it should last longer. Also the size of the 'ball' portion of the device is much bigger in the new technique, which decreases the chance of dislocation."

The technique offers a return to more normal movement, too. "Subjectively, for patients, the resurfaced femur is almost identical to the size of their natural bone, and they tend to say it feels more like a normal hip," Lighthart adds. It also reduces the likelihood of tendonitis that may occur in more traditional hip-replacement surgery.

The resurfacing surgery isn't for everyone, Lighthart cautions. "Especially in older women with osteoporosis, one of the most common conditions I treat is a femoral neck

fracture. Because this new surgery leaves the femoral neck intact, that problem would still exist.”

Lighthart explains that the ideal candidate is a young to middle-aged male who presents with premature arthritis of the hip but has good bone quality. In one such recent case, Lighthart’s patient was a 36-year-old male who had been highly active and athletic. Six weeks following the hip resurfacing procedure, Lighthart says, the patient was already extremely active again. “He’s doing great,” Lighthart says. “There seems to be pretty good evidence that you can be more active with this type of surgery.”

To perform the surgery, Lighthart says that physicians must be FDA-certified. In fact, he believes that only a couple of other Vermont physicians are currently trained to offer it.

### **Cervical Disk Replacement**

Meanwhile, Lighthart’s colleague, Dr. Matthew Zmurko, recently performed a cervical disk replacement procedure that is widely anticipated to improve the recovery and long-term benefits of spinal disk surgery.

“This surgery is an alternative to a cervical spinal fusion with the benefit of hopefully allowing patients to maintain their natural range of motion in the neck,” Zmurko explains. He says several cervical discs have recently been approved by the FDA, and that the procedure is usually recommended for patients suffering from the symptoms of degenerative cervical disc disease or acute cervical disc herniation.

“Cervical fusions have been one of our best surgeries in treating patients with cervical disc herniations—it’s the ‘gold standard’ procedure—but studies have shown an increased risk of degenerative changes that occur next to the operated level that occasionally are problematic,” Zmurko says. “Recent multi-center randomized studies have shown improvements in two-year follow-up for patients undergoing cervical disc replacement, when compared to those who had cervical fusions.”

In a standard fusion, a bone and plate are introduced into the affected joint to make it a solid, inflexible piece. With the disk replacement, a metal device with articulating components is inserted into the disc space and attached to the spine on either side. The outcome allows for a resumption of flexion, extension, side bending, and rotation of the neck.

Zmurko recently performed the cervical disk replacement surgery on two patients. “Both patients were young with a single affected level and good preservation of disc space height, which made them good candidates for this type of surgery,” he notes. The patients usually experience a return of mobility in a short time. “The main goal is to get them moving to maintain and hopefully improve their motion at that level,” he says.

Prior to these recent surgeries, the cervical disc replacement had never been performed in Vermont. “It’s a fairly new technology that requires some specialized training,” Zmurko says.

He thinks that the future bodes well for adding the surgical technique to the treatment of cervical disc herniations. “I have high hopes for it; when you have something like this that shows improved results over a typical cervical fusion—which has a 90-percent success rate—that’s a very good thing.”

The Vermont Orthopaedic Clinic was founded in 1996, and is dedicated to the treatment, training, research and rehabilitation of orthopaedic and sports related injuries and conditions. The clinic’s medical team includes team physicians for the U.S. Ski and Snowboard teams and many other regional athletic programs. The VOC shares an affiliation with the nearby Rutland Regional Medical Center and is dedicated to serving as the best community hospital and health system in New England.