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Breakthrough treatment is alternative to the hysterectomy, takes just 20 minutes, and reduces absenteeism



by Kimberly Moran Turner, MD

Most women learn about menstruation when they are teenagers —hearing that menstruation occurs about every 28 days, lasts four to five days, and is no big deal.

For millions of women, however, menstruation is not that simple. Many women experience periods that last longer than seven days and may be accompanied by profuse bleeding, clotting, and severe cramping. The clinical name for this type of excessive menstrual bleeding is menorrhagia.

For those who have menorrhagia, there is nothing simple about menstruation. Menorrhagia affects quality of life, and can lead to anemia, or low blood counts. Chronic anemia is an unhealthy condition which can lead to chronic fatigue, dizziness, and even blood transfusions. As a result of these intense symptoms, many women lose time from work and their quality of life is dramatically affected.

More than 27 million women are affected by menorrhagia. Women often complain to their gynecologic or primary care providers about menorrhagia. In the past, many of these women had hysterectomies, which is major surgery accompanied by long recuperation periods.

There is a new procedure, which is providing to relief to thousands of women suffering from heavy bleeding.

It is called the HerOption cryoablation.

Cryoablation uses sub-zero temperatures to reduce or eliminate the excessive menstrual flow by destroying the uterine lining, or endometrium. When the lining is altered in this way, the menstrual flow is much lighter or sometimes non-existent.

The in-office procedure of cryoablation takes 20 to 30 minutes, and is virtually pain free. This procedure does not affect the uterus or ovaries, just the endometrial lining so hormone levels remain unaffected. There is no weight gain, mood swings, irritability or surgical scars to heal.

Here's how it works:

While in the office, a slim probe is inserted vaginally through the cervix and into the uterus. Valium and an injectable form of ibuprofen are given before the procedure to reduce anxiety and cramping. Once in place, the probe freezes tissue symmetrically around the tip. Most women report some cramping or a mild pressure during the procedure, but almost no pain. The majority of women return to their regular activities the same day, which is great news for employers.

There are other ways to ablate the endometrium, but cryoablation is a safe

and easy way to avoid going to the hospital, getting a general anesthetic, and still have a great reduction in abnormal bleeding. The cryoablation is very safe since the uterus is monitored during the procedure with ultrasound. The ultrasound assures the doctor that there is no damage outside of the uterus during the procedure.

According to American Medical Systems, the Maryland-based company which provides the HerOption equipment to gynecologists in the area, 96 percent of patients would recommend this procedure to a friend, with 91 percent saying they are extremely satisfied 24 months after the procedure. In addition to a reduction in bleeding each month, many women who have had the cryoablation procedure report a reduction in PMS symptoms, including fatigue, irritability and cramping.

Most insurances cover the procedure after co-pays and deductibles.

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