

YRMC's Heart Center Offers Minimally Invasive Lung Procedures

Some Quad City residents have an alternative to major lung surgery, thanks to Video-Assisted Thoracoscopic Surgery (VATS) Lobectomy. The VATS procedure is performed by Vincent Lee, MD, an accomplished cardiothoracic surgeon at the James Family Heart Center at Yavapai Regional Medical Center (YRMC) West.

“VATS allows us to forego the traditional surgical incision,” said Dr. Lee. “This makes recovery easier for patients.”

Traditional lung surgery requires longer hospitalization, a lengthier recovery and is more uncomfortable for patients.

“There are many layers of skin and muscle between the ribs that need to heal following an open-chest procedure,” Dr. Lee said. “But with VATS Lobectomy, most patients are walking the day after the procedure.”

During a VATS Lobectomy, Dr. Lee makes several small incisions between the patient's ribs. He then inserts surgical instruments that are no bigger than soda straws, along with a miniature video camera called a thoracoscope. The thoracoscope, which includes a light source, transmits images of the chest's interior onto a video monitor, allowing Dr. Lee to guide the surgical instruments and perform the procedure.

VATS is used to remove masses or lesions on the lungs in order to determine if they are benign or cancerous. It also may be used to remove a lung or for “wedge resection.” During a VATS Lobectomy, Dr. Lee removes a lobe of the lung that includes the malignant lesion in order to treat or cure lung cancer. VATS also may be used to treat recurring fluid build-up in the chest as well as to repair damage after a traumatic accident. VATS also is used for people who have not responded to traditional treatment for pneumonia.

Today, a variety of VATS procedures are available to address a wide-range of conditions. For example, VATS Sympathectomy, introduced recently at YRMC, helps people who suffer from hyperhidrosis, a condition characterized by excessive blushing and perspiration. During VATS Sympathectomy, the sympathetic nerves in the chest are clamped or divided in order to halt or diminish hyperhidrosis.

Most of Dr. Lee's work focuses on surgically repairing heart defects as well as replacing and repairing heart valves and conducting heart bypass operations. However, he has a special interest in minimally invasive lung procedures, like VATS.

“These kinds of procedures are important to people so I am glad to offer them to our community,” he said.