

# Recovery times slashed by three weeks

**Michael Parker**, Consultant General and Colorectal Surgeon at Darent Valley Hospital has been working to improve outcomes for his patients through laparoscopic surgery and the Enhanced Recovery Programme

**MICHAEL PARKER**



A specialist in laparoscopic surgery, Michael and his team at Darent Valley Hospital, Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust, were keen to reduce the recovery time of patients undergoing major bowel surgery. This included not only the time for patients to leave hospital following surgery, but the time for them to return to feeling 'normal' once discharged.

For Michael this was crucial as clinical studies involving the enhanced recovery programme had so far focused primarily on the length of stay in hospital. Michael explains, "We were particularly interested in whether we could help our patients return to normal more quickly. By that, we mean returning to the activities they were able to complete before going into hospital whether that be going to the shops, walking their dog or in some cases returning to work."

The team at Darent Valley combined laparoscopic surgery with the enhanced recovery programme for a series of 200 patients undergoing colorectal surgery between January 2003 and June 2007. These patients were compared against a group of patients undergoing open colorectal surgery, also at Darent Valley.

The enhanced recovery programme combines a number of factors to speed up recovery; carbohydrate loading prior to surgery, use of laparoscopic surgical techniques, better cardiac and fluid monitoring and early return to food following surgery.

The results were astonishing. The median length of stay in hospital was reduced to just five days. In comparison the UK National Bowel Cancer Audit for 2004-5 reports the national average for open colorectal surgery to be almost double, at 11 days. The median length of time for patients at Darent Valley to return to 'normal' was slashed by three weeks, from 29 days (for patients undergo-



ing open surgery) to just seven.

"Such fantastic results are a huge boost for both patients and staff" comments Michael. "By enabling patients to leave hospital sooner and recover more quickly we are saving the trust a significant amount of money. For the third of patients we treated who were returning to work we also saved the economy substantial sums by enabling them to return to work a full three weeks earlier than before."

Michael's team is looking at the possibility of reducing length of stay by one more day which may be the optimum without increasing the risk of readmission.

Michael and his team now hope to extend the combination of laparoscopic surgery and the enhanced recovery programme to other surgical specialties.

The future for patients undergoing major surgery at Darent Valley is certainly bright. ●

Michael is currently President of the Association of Laparoscopic Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland. The results of the study at Darent Valley were presented to the Association's annual general meeting in November 2007. Further information: [reducinglengthofstay.org.uk](http://reducinglengthofstay.org.uk)

## The enhanced surgery recovery programme explained

### Pre-operative assessment

Comprehensive preparation of the patient prior to admission including a package of education to better inform them about their surgery and an assessment of their fitness using cardio-pulmonary exercise testing.

### During the operation

The use of minimally invasive surgical techniques and precise anaesthetic care with specialist cardiac and fluid monitoring - Oesophageal Doppler Monitoring (ODM) - during and immediately after the operation.

### Post-operative systems

A defined programme including rapid mobilisation and early return to eating and drinking that minimises surgical complications while encouraging patient recovery and discharge.