
LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Reply to:

Editorial – Technologies and traditional skills

Laurence H. Klotz

Can J Urol 2002;9(4):1572-1573.

Urologists in the United States look to (and appreciate) our more sober Canadian colleagues to balance our optimistic, often exaggerated scientific claims with healthy skepticism, armed with results from sound clinical trials. It comes then as somewhat of a surprise that Dr. Klotz in his recent editorial (Can J Urol 2002;9(4):1572-1573) departs from evidence-based medicine to unabashedly endorse laparoscopy in cancer management. Although he very well may be right, and certainly the pendulum and training are heading that way, he concludes that "the window of opportunity for a randomized trial(s)...has closed," and that "clinical equipoise has been lost due to surgical progress."

Is cancer control with laparoscopy comparable to open surgical resection? We are told that laparoscopy can replicate open surgery in all aspects with less morbidity and more rapid painless full recovery. For surgeons who have climbed and surmounted the steep learning curve, maybe. And even if cancer control is equivalent, is quality of life better (with its soft endpoints), and when compared to modern practice pathways, where patients undergo radical or partial nephrectomy in 1-2 hours, for example, thru small incisions and go home in 2-3 days. Again, the answer is maybe. Why not prove it?

Other disciplines are conducting clinical trials of laparoscopy vs. open surgery. Randomized trials are being conducted by cooperative groups in the United States and Europe involving patients with uterine and colon cancers to test whether laparoscopy is as good or better than open surgical techniques, both in the quality of surgery achieving optimal cancer control

and quality of recovery. Should we as urologists not expect the same level of scrutiny? I suggest that the window of opportunity for randomized trials has not passed, but it is rapidly disappearing. The time to return to scientific medicine is now, which includes new technology and techniques such as laparoscopy.

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