

Woman joins internationally renowned “keyhole surgery” team

A pioneering woman surgeon has this month joined the NHS trust that runs Colchester General Hospital.

Miss Jo Reed was one of the first women in the UK to be appointed as a consultant general surgeon with a specialist interest in laparoscopic – so-called “keyhole surgery” – when she became a consultant in 2000.

She is keen to be a role model for other women and is thrilled that three of the four specialist surgical registrars who started at Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust this month are women.

One of the main factors that attracted her to the Trust is its reputation as a leading centre of laparoscopic surgery.

“When I started out in laparoscopic surgery I was aware that Colchester was a leading centre for laparoscopic surgery, with a national and international reputation for its surgeons and its teaching courses,” she said.

“I’ve joined the Trust as a consultant upper gastrointestinal and general laparoscopic surgeon and my colleagues have made me feel really welcome.

“Women surgeons are still very unusual and I have sometimes been the only female surgeon at conferences. Some patients are still surprised to find out that their surgeon is a woman.”

Laparoscopic surgery is the opposite of open surgery and involves making small incisions rather than large cuts, which means patients can spend less time in hospital and recover more quickly. It is a technique being applied to a rising number of procedures across more and more specialties.

One of the pioneers of laparoscopic surgery in the UK was Professor Roger Motson who continues to work in Colchester as a consultant. Laparoscopic surgeons from Essex Rivers Healthcare have published many academic papers, spoken at international conferences, taught abroad and train overseas doctors who come to Colchester to learn their trade.

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Professor Motson said: "We are delighted to welcome Jo Reed to the team. As a senior woman surgeon with her track record in laparoscopic surgery, she will complement our existing team perfectly."

Miss Reed is based at Colchester General Hospital but will shortly be starting a fortnightly outpatient clinic at Clacton Hospital.

Among the procedures she carries out are cholecystectomies (removal of the gall bladder), hernia operations, the removal of the spleen and adrenal glands, surgery for people with gastro-oesophageal reflux disease and achalasia (narrowing of the bottom of the gullet) and stomach cancer surgery.

Her husband, Nick, who is a house husband, has many links to north east and mid Essex and for the past four years the couple and their two daughters have been regular visitors to Brightlingsea where they sail a Colchester oyster smack that dates back to 1909.

Originally from Coventry and the daughter of a gynaecologist, Miss Reed went to medical school in Nottingham and then spent most of her early surgical training in and around Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

She had been planning to become a breast surgeon but experienced a Damascene conversion to laparoscopic surgery in 1997 while spending a year working in Melbourne where she experienced advanced laparoscopic techniques for the first time.

On her return, Miss Reed went to Leeds and then Hull for two years of intensive specialist training in laparoscopic surgery. She started her consultant career at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, Huntingdon, in 2000 where she introduced laparoscopic techniques and built up the surgical department which subsequently gained an excellent reputation for its laparoscopic surgery and teaching. As a senior consultant she was Head of the Department of Surgery for the last 18 months, also gaining managerial experience.

Miss Reed has a particular interest in training both junior surgeons and established consultants and will be taking part in the regular training courses that take place at the Iceni Centre at Colchester General Hospital.

With her husband and two daughters, aged 14 and 12, she is currently living in hospital accommodation in Colchester. The girls have switched to schools in Colchester - and one has already twice experienced the A&E department at Colchester General Hospital after breaking her collar bone!

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