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Albany Center offers 'band-aid' sterilization surgery

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ONE OF THE few medical clinics catering exclusively to women, Albany Women's Medical Center, 5088 N. Elston Ave., has opened a new surgical wing for outpatient laparoscopic tubal sterilizations.

Simpler than the older method of tying the fallopian tubes, laparoscopy is a 20-minute procedure requiring two small abdominal cuts that sever the tubes. The cuts are stitched and covered with a band-aid, and the patient can go home a few hours later.

Medical Director Dr. Louis Myers, an obstetrician-gynecologist affiliated with Prentice Women's Hospital, does the surgery. He is assisted at the center by nine other obstetrician-gynecologists and two internists.

UNLIKE MOST medical clinics, Albany provides free, non-judgmental counseling and educational services to patients. Social workers and other trained counselors perform those functions, freeing the doctors to concentrate solely on medical work.

Patients requesting sterilization are counseled one week before surgery is scheduled to give them adequate time to reconsider, according to Elaine Levy, public relations director. The younger the patient, the more counseling she receives. "Sterilization is not en-

couraged in the very young," she said.

Patients are assured of complete confidentiality at the center. "Family planning is contrary to many family values," Levy said. "It's still not a comfortable subject for everyone."

ALBANY'S PATIENT load has increased about 20 per cent each year since it opened its present facility in 1977. The birth control clinic now sees about 250 patients per week, and some 150 abortions are performed every week.

Most patients live within five or 10 miles of the clinic, are white, single and Protestant. However, 68 per cent of the abortion patients are Catholic, said staff member Dorothy Barth. The mean age of patients is 21.

About 10 per cent of abortion patients are Spanish. Although many Spanish communities have gynecological clinics, Catholic doctors and hospitals refuse to do abortions or sterilizations, Levy noted.

Many women from surrounding states come to Albany for abortions, Barth said, because there are few abortion facilities outside of large cities. The clinic does not perform second trimester abortions but refers those patients elsewhere.

THE CLINIC has received more inquiries from women seeking abortions since Cook County Hospital



A surgical team at Albany Women's Medical Center assists Dr. Louis Myers in a laparoscopic tubal sterilization. This 20-minute operation is almost as simple as vasectomy for men.

stopped doing them a few weeks ago. Albany refers women who can't afford its \$200 fee for abortions to the Planned Parenthood Assn. downtown.

Sterilization surgery, which costs less than \$1,000 at Albany, is covered by private health insurance, and abor-

tion is covered by many policies.

The center plans to add cosmetic surgery to its services about the beginning of next year. It is also remodeling its original surgical clinic at 3754 W. Irving Park Road, which will reopen soon.