

HOW CAN INTERVENTIONAL RADIOLOGY IMPACT WOMEN'S HEALTH?

While historically surgery was the only treatment available, today new medical advances offer promising treatments for women

• LIDAR GRAVÉ-LAZI

"Women, as patients, place a higher value on preventive behavior, report more symptoms, and are more likely than men to seek treatment for most diseases," Dr. Zalman Itzhakov, an interventional radiologist and the Chairman of the Diagnostic Imaging Institute at the E. Wolfson Medical Center recently told *The Jerusalem Post*.

Dr. Itzhakov sat down with *The Post* to discuss advances in women's health, primarily in the field of Interventional Radiology (IR).

"Historically, traditional surgery was the only treatment available to alleviate many life-altering symptoms for women," he said.

The last two decades, however, have seen significant advances as IR has developed new image-guided techniques to deliver minimally invasive, targeted treatments for conditions impacting women's health, with less pain and shorter recovery

time than open surgery, he explained.

"IR offers significant benefits in treating unique women's health conditions – from infertility and uterine fibroids to pelvic venous disease – and can improve their quality of life," he said.

Infertility is a leading issue in women's reproductive health.

According to Dr. Itzhakov, blocked fallopian tubes are a common cause of this condition.

"Fallopian tubes connect the ovaries and the uterus. During ovulation, the fallopian tubes carry an egg from an ovary to the uterus. If an egg is fertilized by sperm, it moves through the fallopian tube to the uterus for implantation. When a fallopian tube is obstructed, sperm can't fertilize an egg," he said.

Common reasons for blocked fallopian tubes, he explained, include "scar tissue due to pelvic inflammatory disease, endometriosis, uterine fibroids, and pelvic adhesions from past surgery."

"An IR treatment called fallopian tube recanalization (FTR) may be an option for those with this condition and

also be an alternative to in vitro fertilization (IVF)," he said, adding that FTR has a "better pregnancy rate compared to IVF."

Another common condition mainly found in reproductive-age women is uterine fibroids, benign (non-cancerous) tumors arising from the muscular layer of the uterus.

"They are often found incidentally during a routine gynecology exam," he said. "The most common symptoms are abnormal uterine bleeding, pelvic pain, and reproductive dysfunction such as infertility or miscarriage."

Dr. Itzhakov said that being overweight, having high blood pressure, having a family history of fibroids, and being over 40 without having children are associated with an increased risk of developing the condition.

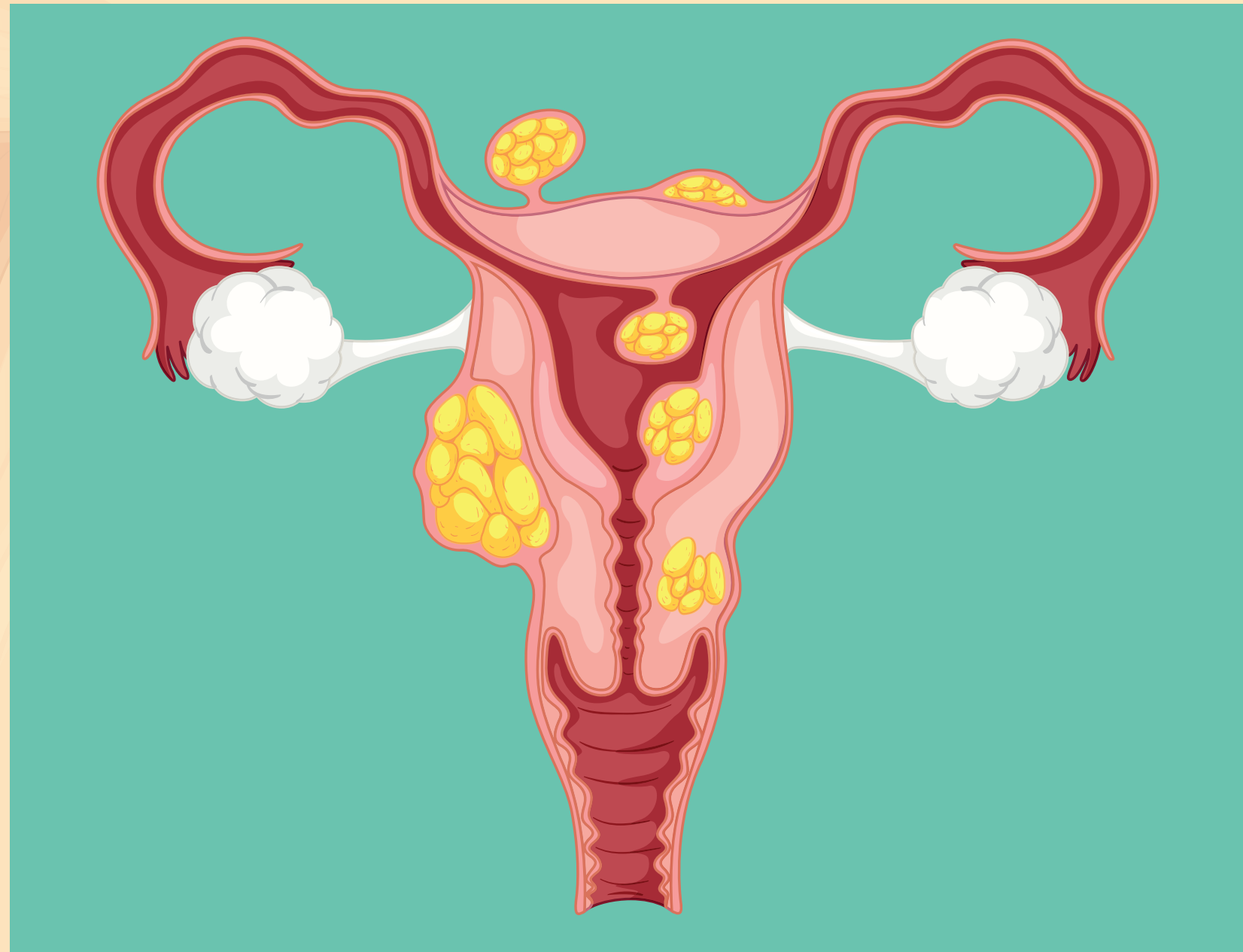
"Diagnosis is made based on medical history, pelvic examination, ultrasound, and hysteroscopy examination," he said. "Additional evaluation is needed when intervention is planned, or malignant disease is suspected."



▲ Dr. Zalman Itzhakov
(Photo by Moran Nissim)

Dr. Itzhakov said that, unfortunately, most women believe that the only treatment available is a hysterectomy, which is the complete removal of the uterus.

"IR can offer minimally invasive treatment, **uterine fibroid embolization**, as an



▲ Uterine fibroids (Freepik.com)

alternative to procedures such as hysterectomy," he said.

The procedure is under sedation and involves inserting a thin catheter to access the artery feeding the fibroid guided by x-ray. Then, once a catheter is in position, tiny particles are injected to block the small vessels of the fibroid. When embolization is completed, the catheter is removed.

"This procedure can help preserve fertility, control symptoms, and improve quality of life," he said. "Most women return to their regular activity in about one week."

Pelvic Venous Disorder (PeVD) is another condition affecting women, characterized by the presence of dilated veins in the pelvic area, which causes chronic pain.

The average diagnosis time for the syndrome is four years, with pain levels increasing throughout those years.

"When there is a problem of venous drainage, the blood fails to drain upwards towards the heart, and the veins in the pelvic area enlarge, pressing on nearby organs, which is the source of the syndrome's pain," he explained.

When the symptoms are

more advanced, Dr. Itzhakov recommends a highly effective, minimally invasive procedure in an outpatient clinic.

The procedure, he explained, involves inserting a thin catheter into the afflicted veins with local anesthetic and guided by ultrasound and x-ray. Once a catheter is in place, metal coils are inserted, and a liquid embolic agent is injected, causing venous occlusion to stop pelvic vein reflux.

"From the technical aspect, the success rate of these treatments stands at 95% from the clinical aspect, and about 80% of the

patients report high satisfaction within two weeks," he said.

According to Dr. Itzhakov, although women "tend to make most of the healthcare decisions within families," many are still unaware of the advances and possibilities for women's reproductive health.

"Today, there are more options and better treatments than ever before," he said. "If you struggle with infertility or other life-altering conditions of the pelvis, IR can improve your quality of life and offer treatments without the pain and inconvenience of invasive surgery." ■