

SARAH JONES meets a pioneering surgeon who is putting Southampton firmly on the world map. After speaking to Mohammed Abu Hilal and one of his grateful patients, she scrubbed up and stepped into theatre to see the radical new treatment for herself.



Mr Mohammed Abu Hilal, far right, with his team of registrars

Through the keyhole

HE IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF A groundbreaking new treatment that is transforming his patients' lives.

Mohammed Abu Hilal is one of only a handful of surgeons in the country who can conduct the revolutionary operation.

He performs keyhole surgery on the pancreas, an incredibly complex and delicate procedure.

"You have to be precise 100 per cent. There is no space for any mistakes," says the Jerusalem born surgeon.

But patients at Southampton are in

incredibly safe hands as Mohammed Abu Hilal – who performed the first pancreatic keyhole operation at Southampton 12 months ago – has a 100 per cent success rate.

He decided to get involved in the speciality because he was determined to make a difference.

"Pancreatic cancer still has the worst prognosis of all cancers. I thought there is still a lot to be done to improve results and this is what I want to do."

The procedure is carried out on patients

who need either tumours or cysts, which are often pre-cancerous, removed from their pancreas.

Appointed almost two years ago, the 37-year-old is the only surgeon who conducts the procedure at Southampton General.

In fact the hospital is the only place in the south, outside London, where pancreatic surgery is carried out using the technique.

As a centre of regional excellence for all types of pancreatic surgery, together with his colleagues Neil Pearce and Colin

Johnson he treats all patients with operable pancreatic tumours from Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Dorset, south Wiltshire, West Sussex and the Channel Islands. More than £1m has been invested at Southampton in new staff, drugs and equipment, including the



Patient **LIBBY HUTCH** explains how having this type of ground-breaking

CASE STUDY

"I USED TO THINK I would rather die than have this pain." Regularly doubled up in agony, no one could tell Libby Hutch what was causing her frequent bouts of excruciating abdominal discomfort.

Whenever she experienced an attack, she was forced to put her life on hold for weeks on end as the stabbing pain was so bad that she could not eat, sleep or go to work.

Gaunt, tense and suffering financially because she was self-employed, she was

desperate to find out what was happening to her body.

It had all started when she was rushed to hospital with acute pancreatitis four years before.

She underwent major surgery and spent two weeks in intensive care on a ventilator.

From then on she continued to have recurrent bouts of the debilitating pain which would leave the keen horsewoman hospitalised several times a year.

Despite numerous tests and investigations, no one could shed any light on the

cause of her nightmare four-year ordeal.

That was until, she was referred to Mohammed Abu Hilal.

"They could never work out what it was," said Libby, who lives in Hertfordshire.

"Eventually my consultant said, 'There is a brilliant guy down in Southampton. Would you like us to refer you to him?'"

That was the beginning of the end of Libby's suffering.

The Southampton surgeon soon found a large cyst on the 38-year-old's pancreas along with an obstruction of

her pancreatic duct and recommended surgery.

Despite the previous surgery on her pancreas, which had left a lot of adhesions, he promised Libby that he, would try to remove the cyst with keyhole surgery.

The four and a half-hour operation was a great success and Libby's life has been completely transformed as a result.

It turned out that the cyst was completely benign and was the result of pancreatic duct obstruction, which had caused her so much pain.



"He has changed my life and I can't thank him enough"