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ROBOTIC-ASSISTED SURGERY EXPANDS INTO GYNECOLOGY

Local Surgeon First to Perform Hysterectomy with da Vinci® Robot

Dr. Hassan Shahbandar is the first OB/GYN in the Fox Cities to utilize robotic-assisted, minimally invasive procedure to perform a hysterectomy using ThedaCare's da Vinci® robot.

Dr. Shahbandar, of Women's Health Specialists, performed the surgeries on Nov. 2 at Theda Clark Medical Center in Neenah. He said he saw the potential for new technology. "It was my dream to operate like that, with the precision of a robot," he said. "At first you think it is only science fiction, but it is right here, in the Fox Cities. This is the surgery of the future, but it's happening today."

On June 8, ThedaCare™ performed its first successful radical prostatectomy using the da Vinci robot. Since, then, physicians have performed 20 prostatectomies and two kidney reconstruction surgeries, said Tait Fors, MD, who, along with Dan Higgins, MD, co-lead ThedaCare's Robotic program. Dr. Shahbandar has two more robotic-assisted hysterectomies scheduled. Other OB/GYNs who practice at Appleton Medical Center and Theda Clark plan to utilize the robot for gynecological procedures.

Tammy Weir, 36, had suffered many menstrual issues and was referred to Dr. Shahbandar by her family physician, Dr. Earl Anderson of ThedaCare Physicians-Waupaca. When she was told she would be the first patient to have a hysterectomy using a robot in the Fox Cities, she admitted she was a bit nervous, because the surgeon is not at the patient's side.

"But I went on the internet and watched the procedure first as a laproscopic surgery and then with the robot, and I became completely at ease," said Weir, a mother of three. "And Dr. Shahbandar was wonderful explaining to me what he would be doing. "

The robot consists of four robotic arms with multiple joints that allow for amazing dexterity in performing surgery. While nurses, technicians and an anesthesiologist attend to the patient at the surgery table, the surgeon controls the robot arms and instruments from a special panel positioned a few feet away.

In order to also put her family at ease, she helped her children relate to the procedure as best as they could. "My 13-year-old son is big into Play Station," she said. "I told him that it was like Dr. Shahbandar was playing Play Station on Mom, and he thought that was cool."

She recovered quickly, in four days, with very little bleeding. "I have kids to watch, laundry to do, and a husband who was deer hunting. I could not be laid up for weeks," Weir said. "I actually had a harder time recovering from my gall bladder surgery."

Polly Ebbinger, 39, suffered from fibroids in her uterus, and was Dr. Shahbandar's second patient on Nov. 2. She is somewhat used to having a place in health care history; her son Ryan was one of the first infants to have an echocardiogram done on him at Mayo Clinic while he was still in uterine. "Robotic surgery is more common," said Ebbinger, a mother of three from Clintonville. "Normally you think bigger cities have technology like this, but its here, in Neenah, Wisconsin. And its wonderful to have this available to patients."



Manufactured by Intuitive Surgical of Sunnyvale, Calif., the da Vinci Surgical System is the only approved robotic surgery system now available. There are more than 450 da Vinci systems in service in the United States, including 11 in Wisconsin.

The robotic-assisted procedure is considered to be just as effective as traditional hysterectomies, but with significantly shorter hospital stays, reduced pain, faster recoveries and quicker return to normal function. Many patients can be discharged from the hospital the day following surgery.

“I love what I do, and I’ve seen quite the evolution of medicine since I began practicing in 1973, and it will continue,” said Dr. Shahbandar. “This robot will get smaller in size and will be used for more procedures – to treat cancer, endometriosis, infertility, tubal ligation reversal, and some cases of pelvic reconstructive surgery. I am thankful to have this available to my patients at Theda Clark Medical Center.”

“We are excited that robotic-assisted surgery is expanding in the Fox Cities,” said Matthew Furlan, chief operating officer of Appleton Medical Center and Theda Clark Medical Center. “It is predicted that within a decade, the use of robotics in many types of surgery will be just as common as the laparoscope is today.”

In addition to gynecological surgeries, the da Vinci has been used successfully and has shown promise for a number of different procedures including bariatric surgery, thoroscopic surgery, mitral valve repair, atrial septal defect surgery, coronary revascularization, and various types of urologic surgeries.

The da Vinci robot is located at Theda Clark Medical Center, but serves the entire ThedaCare service area, including Appleton Medical Center, New London Family Medical Center, and Riverside Medical Center. Leadership of the robotics program is provided by the surgeons of both Urology Associates of Neenah and Valley Urologic Associates in Appleton.