

Robotic surgery comes to Lawnwood

By JAY MEISEL
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FORT PIERCE — The recently acquired robot at Lawnwood Regional Medical Center and Heart Institute doesn't walk, talk or think like its counterparts in science fiction movies and television shows.

But within the next several weeks, hospital officials expect the da Vinci robot to perform the more vital function of helping to save lives, they said last week.

Drs. Adam J. Ball and Scott Van Appledorn will be opening an office in Fort Pierce and performing prostate removal

surgery with the robot — operations that avoid some of the pitfalls of traditional surgery.

Surgery with the robot requires smaller incisions, resulting in a shorter hospital stay, less pain, less risk of infection, less blood loss and transfusions, less scarring, faster recovery and a quicker return to normal activities, Dr. Ball said.

In years to come, the robot may be used by cardiologists and gynecologists. Training for gynecologists is expected to begin soon.

Lawnwood's \$1.2 million investment in the

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da Vinci Robotic Surgery System from Intuitive Surgical Inc in Mountain View, Calif. is part of the hospital's continuing commitment to providing quality and comprehensive medical care, said Beth Williams, director of public relations.

"It's an investment in technology to bring better medical outcomes for our patients," Mrs. Williams said.

The hospital continually does need assessments to determine what services and medical specialties are needed in the community, she said. Urology is one area where the need has grown significantly, Mrs. Williams said.

For the first time, Treasure Coast residents will have the opportunity for minimally invasive surgery without having to travel significant distance, she said.

Currently the closest hospitals that offer the surgery are in the southern Palm Beach County and Orlando areas, Mrs. Williams said.

The surgical system includes control panel that give the doctor a

three-dimensional view of the area where the surgery will be conducted and up to 15 times magnification of that area, Dr. Ball said.

Dr. Ball said the system allows him to precisely control the arms of robots, as the prostate is removed.

While traditional surgery requires incisions of several inches, the incisions using the robotic surgery are less than an inch, he said. Hospital stays are reduced from two to three days to one to two days, he said.

Research also shows that the robotic surgery lowers the risk of impotence and incontinence, he said.

Dr. Ball joined with Dr. Appledorn in forming Gulf Stream Urology Associates.

They met at the University of Miami, where they attended medical school.

Dr. Ball said that before committing to opening a practice in Fort Pierce they met with representatives of several hospitals and found Lawnwood to be most receptive to the idea of adding robotic surgery.

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Supplied by Intuitive Surgical

The robotic da Vinci Surgical System will be used to perform urology related surgeries. The da Vinci provides the surgeon with a true 3-D view of the operation. This direct and natural hand-eye instrument alignment is similar to open surgery with 'all-around' vision and the ability to zoom in and zoom out.