

The Road to Recovery Just Got Faster

ROBOTIC HEART SURGERY AT PVH

John Farrell was definitely in the right place at the right time.

A security guard at Poudre Valley Hospital, John arrived at work on the morning of April 6, 2005, and began to feel intense pressure in his chest.

“It felt like somebody kicked me dead in the chest and put a Volkswagen on it,” he said. “If I had been at home, I might not have done anything about it. But since I was at PVH, I had it checked out.”

John was rushed to the cardiac catheterization lab, where an angiogram revealed a 90 percent blockage in one of his coronary arteries. He was having a heart attack. Lucky for John, immediate treatment halted the heart attack and prevented permanent damage to his heart muscle.

But John soon learned that being at PVH would prove fortuitous for a second reason as well. He needed bypass surgery to circumvent the blockage, and Dr. Michael Stanton, a PVH heart surgeon, had recently begun performing robotic-assisted bypass surgery. He explained to John that he was a candidate for this new technology.

“Before this happened to me, my brother had had several traditional bypass surgeries, so I’d seen what it would be like to have your chest cracked open,” said John. “When Dr. Stanton told me he could do the surgery without opening my chest, I was so relieved.”

How it works

Dr. Stanton performs cardiac robotic surgery at Poudre Valley Hospital with the sophisticated da Vinci™ robotic surgical system, which consists of four robotic arms controlled by a computerized console.

During a robotic surgery, Dr. Stanton makes three or four dime-sized incisions between the patient’s ribs and inserts a robotic arm through each opening. One of the arms holds a camera with 10X magnification and the others hold microsurgical instruments with the same full range of motion as the surgeon’s wrist and hand. Dr. Stanton then sits at the console a few feet away from the patient and—very precisely and in real-time—operates the microsurgical instruments.

Coronary bypass, mitral valve repair and more

Dr. Stanton began performing robotic

cardiac and lung surgeries last year and has since completed more than 30 procedures. He is the only cardiothoracic surgeon who performs robotic-assisted cardiac surgery in the region between Omaha, Las Vegas, Phoenix and Canada.

Dr. Stanton has found that the robotic technique is most appropriate for repairing mitral valves, closing holes in the heart, removing cardiac and lung tumors, and performing single-vessel cardiac bypass surgery. He expects to add multiple-vessel bypass, mitral valve replacement and aortic valve replacement to his robotic capabilities within the coming year or two.

Lynette Garcia, 46, underwent robotic mitral valve repair with Dr. Stanton in January 2006. She was in the hospital for 3 nights and returned to work after

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A kinder, gentler approach

For chest surgery patients, the biggest benefit of robotic surgery is that the sternum doesn’t need to be cut.

Traditionally, the term “open heart surgery” means that the surgeon has to cut the breastbone vertically down the middle and spread the ribcage apart to be able to get his hands and instruments on the heart. Patients with full sternal incisions typically spend 5-7 nights in the hospital and when they return home, generally aren’t allowed to drive, lift anything that weighs more than a few pounds, or return to work for 6-8 weeks—followed by an extended “light activity” restriction period. The incision is also very painful for weeks.

Robotic cardiac and lung surgery patients, on the other hand, recover much more quickly from the three or four dime-sized incisions between their ribs. The hospital stay is only 2-3 days and they are able to return to work and normal activities much sooner. They also report experiencing almost no pain.

just 2 weeks. "Robotic surgery was an answer to a prayer," she said.

As for John, he had robotic bypass surgery on his 58th birthday and spent just two nights at PVH. "I have to be honest, there was no pain whatsoever," he said. "Robotic surgery cannot be beat. I got one of the best birthday presents a person could get."

Is it right for you?

To find out if robotic-assisted surgery is right for you, talk to your physician or visit the web at www.pvhs.org.

PVH'S ROBOTICS PIONEERS

As of May 2006, eleven surgeons at PVH are trained to perform robotic-assisted surgery. In addition to cardiac and lung surgeries, a robot is used for gynecological procedures such as hysterectomy and fibroid removal, prostate removal for localized prostate cancer, and some general abdominal surgeries.



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