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OR robots make surgery more precise

Former Barrington resident says robot 'is a great alternative for those who qualify'

By [Joan Warren](#)

EAST BAY — Dr. W. Scott Walker sits behind the controls of a computer console and in some ways performs near miracles with a little help from his friend “Lisa,” better known as a da Vinci Surgical System, a minimally invasive surgical system.



Dr. Scott Walker sits at the controls of the da Vinci Surgical System.

The da Vinci system is used by former Barrington resident Dr. Walker, an Obstetrician at OB-GYN Associates, Inc. and other doctors at Women and Infants Hospital as well as at Miriam Hospital in Pawtucket. The system is used to perform hysterectomies and other surgeries pertaining to the female reproductive system.

Dr. Walker, the only doctor in private practice to be trained on the equipment at the hospital, just completed his 18th robotic surgery since “Lisa” arrived at in April.

“At Miriam Hospital, their da Vinci system is called ‘Mona.’ At Women and Infants, we have chosen ‘Lisa,’ which also stands for Least Invasive Surgical Approach,” he said.

Robotic surgery has been around for a few years, most widely used by urologists for prostate surgery as well as cardiac surgery and on cancer patients by oncologists.

“The robot is a great alternative for those who qualify. The recovery time is so short compared to abdominal and vaginal hysterectomies,” Dr. Walker said.

It is an effective, minimally invasive alternative to both open surgery and laparoscopy. Through the use of the da Vinci, patients generally have a 24-hour hospital stay after a full hysterectomy using this method.

Dr. Walker has been performing laparoscopic surgery for years for less serious cases, but feels the da

Vinci system is the best alternative for more complex surgeries like full hysterectomies.

Debra Deshais recently had a full hysterectomy done by Dr. Walker using the da Vinci system.

“It was wonderful. I was back to work in two weeks. My co-workers were amazed because just two weeks after my surgery, I was playing volleyball at our company picnic,” Ms. Deshais said.

Ms. Deshais said she opted for the robotic surgery after her OBGYN recommended Dr. Walker.

“I needed something that wouldn’t have me out of work too long and when I met Dr. Walker I knew I was doing the right thing. It was so fast and there was no pain. He gave me a prescription for pain meds and I didn’t even need to fill them,” she said.

With an abdominal hysterectomy, a patient spends days in the hospital and has about an eight week recovery time. With a vaginal procedure, recovery is generally about four to six weeks.

The cost for a da Vinci system is about \$1.5 million. The hospital fee for robotic surgery is higher but the fee to the doctor and anesthesiologist is the same as regular surgeries, Dr. Walker said.

How it works

Dr. Walker sits at an ergonomically designed console and looks into a 3-D visual monitor. With two-channel depth and a plus-10 magnifier, he controls every aspect of the surgery. The patient is a few feet away.

The unit gives him precision and dexterity used in traditional open surgery, while only requiring about four small incisions, 1 to 2 cm each and a scope through the belly button. To operate, Dr. Walker uses master controls that work like forceps.

“My fingers work like instruments. This makes suturing much easier and precise. After hours of training on the console and becoming proficient, it is quicker and there is much less loss of blood than tradition surgery” he said.

What is known as a patient cart with four interactive robotic arms is placed over the patient and is equipped with patented EndoWrist instruments.

The da Vinci’s patient cart holds up to three EndoWrist instruments and one 3D camera. Pinpointing the area being operated on, he precisely controls the EndoWrist instruments into the body.

A broad range of instruments are available to help Dr. Walker perform specialized surgical tasks with precision and control.

As he manipulates the controls, the robot responds to his actions in real time, translating his hand, wrist and finger movements into precise movements of miniaturized instruments at the patient-side cart.

A full team of surgical staff are present during the surgery, including another doctor, surgical nurses and an anesthesiologist.

“The ability to do this is amazing. We don’t use the robot just for the sake of using it. Compared to laparoscopy, this is a much better alternative, especially for the more complicated surgeries,” he said.

Dr. Walker resides in Warren after spending more than 20 years living in Barrington. He enjoys sailing and tennis in his spare time.