

By Kerry Firth
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Dr. Adam Kurtin, general surgeon at HCA Florida St. Lucie Hospital, recently completed his 1,000th robotic surgery – all done since 2018, when the hospital invested in a da Vinci robot for a full spectrum of intra-abdominal operations.

“I do about 95 percent of my colorectal, gall bladder and hernia surgeries robotically now,” said Dr. Kurtin, who has been at St. Lucie Hospital for 21 years.

“The robotic procedure provides the surgeon with better optics so we can see better, and more precise instrumentation that allows us to do more precision surgery,” Dr. Kurtin added. “With the improved visualization and precision, the complication rates are much lower. And it improves patient outcomes in terms of length of stays and decrease in the use of narcotics.”

Dr. Kurtin explained that robotic surgery is done by inserting ports into the patient’s abdomen and filling the abdominal cavity with carbon dioxide gas. The da Vinci robot is then positioned next to the patient at the operating table and the robotic arms are connected to these ports. The surgeon then sits at the da Vinci system console to perform the surgery.

“Sitting at the console I can see inside the abdomen 10 times magnified in 3-D high definition,” he continued. “Having that improved visualization allows me to dissect tissues, remove tumors, repair hernias and perform other surgical maneuvers. I have a bedside assistant exchanging instruments as I need them in and out of the ports that are controlled by the robotic arms.

“We have two little finger triggers that my fingers fit into, and I can move my hands around and open and close my fingers to manipulate the instruments. My hand motions are translated into the movement of the instruments inside the abdomen. The stable camera platform allows for enhanced visualization and increased precision.”

“It’s important to note that robotic surgery is not a one-man show,” Dr. Kurtin said. “There are generally about five medical professionals in the operating room including myself, my physician’s assistant, a surgical technician, a circulating nurse and an anesthesiologist. Everyone in the team is necessary to the success of the operation.”

Because robotic surgery is minimally invasive, recovery time is faster. A traditional elective colon surgery, for example, used to mean a hospital stay of seven to nine days. With robotic surgery, patients typically go home in two or three days. And most of the patients with robotic elective colon surgery use almost no narcotic pain medicines. Other benefits of minimally invasive robotic surgery are less pain and blood loss, smaller scars, fewer complications such as surgical site infection, and a quicker return to normal, everyday life activities.

Robotic surgery takes practice, so it’s important to talk to your surgeon about his experience if you are considering a procedure. While nearly all general surgeons are now taught robotic techniques during their residency programs, other more seasoned surgeons like Dr. Kurtin learned it through a series of training programs and mentoring with other surgeons.

"The technology is so new that it wasn't included in my curriculum when I finished my residency in 1996," Dr. Kurtin said.

"We pick up these techniques in our travels trying to improve patient care and outcomes. And the technology is constantly changing with new and exciting developments in the future of robotics coming soon."

Dr. Kurtin takes pride in sharing his knowledge and expertise with three junior partners that he's trained and proctored on doing robotics. He also allows future physician assistants, who spend monthly rotations with him through Florida State University's College of Medicine, to observe robotic surgeries so they may someday become part of a robotic team.

While some may think 1,000 robotic surgeries is enough for a lifetime, Dr. Kurtin has no intention of slowing down. "Not only does the use of robotics make us better surgeons, it also extends a surgeon's careers," he said. "Instead of standing at the table leaning sideways, I'm seated at a console and it's ergonomically easier for the surgeon. So instead of having to retire at 55, I'll be able to work till I'm 65 or longer."

Dr. Adam Kurtin received his medical degree and completed his surgery residency at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. He is board certified in General Surgery by the American Osteopathic Board of Surgery. His office is located at HCA Florida St. Lucie Hospital, 1400 SE Goldtree Dr., Suite 103, Port St. Lucie. Call 772-335-8446 for an appointment.