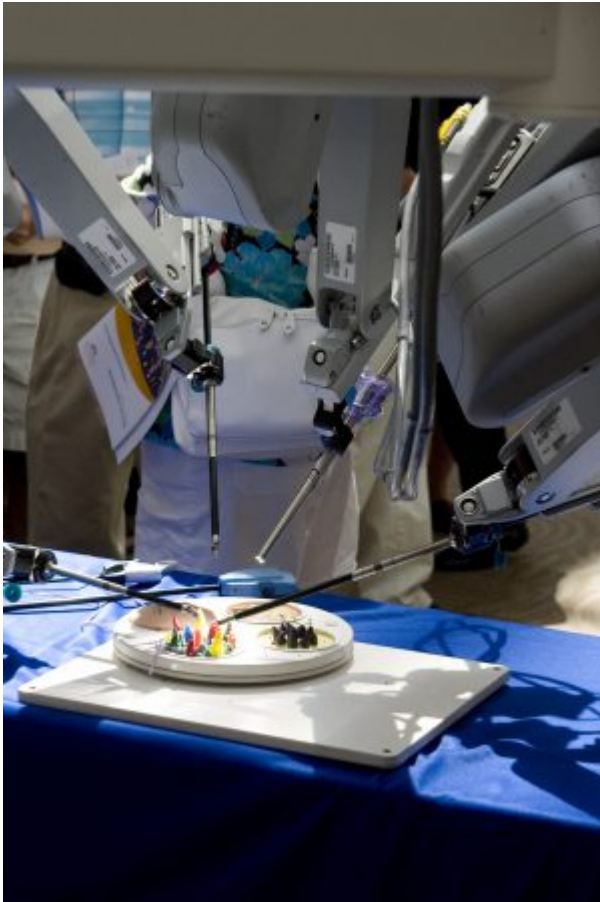


Public gets hands-on time with surgical robot

Ari Cohn, Tribune



A daVinci robotic surgical system, on display courtesy of Scottsdale Healthcare surgeons, is demonstrated at Chandler Fashion Center in Chandler. May 31, 2009.

With his forefinger and thumb, medical student Chad Andicochea gently manipulated the tiny clamps capping the slender arms of a million-dollar "daVinci" surgical robot on a busy Sunday afternoon in the Chandler Fashion Center.

Scottsdale Healthcare allowed the public to test drive two of the machines at an exposition to raise awareness about robotic surgery.

Andicochea, a student of A.T. Still University's Kirksville (Mo.) College of Osteopathic Medicine, said it's the wave of the future, but he had never seen one in person before.

"We were taught about it in class," he said.

Michael Darson, a urologist with the Scottsdale Center for Urology, said the display was meant to help the public feel more comfortable about the use of robots in surgery by letting people handle the machines, which are precise and relatively simple to use. During surgery, the surgeon would be in the same room as the patient, sitting at a console only a few feet away.

"Virtually all of my practice is now robotic," Darson said.

The primary purpose of the robots is to remove the prostate gland in the event that a man develops prostate cancer and doctors counsel that removal is the best option, he said. Without the robots, the surgery entails a major incision in the abdomen.

"We'd open up the pelvis," Darson said.

The use of the robots means less risk because of a smaller incision and less blood loss, he said. Patients often leave the hospital the next day, their bladder control returns quicker, and there is a lower rate of erectile dysfunction, which Darson called a key quality-of-life issue.

"Surgeons kind of torture themselves by always trying to advance the technology in favor of the patient," he said.

Scottsdale Healthcare acquired the state's first daVinci in 2001. Surgeons are using three daVinci robots at Scottsdale Healthcare Thompson Peak Hospital and Scottsdale Healthcare Shea Medical Center. The equipment evolved from prototypes developed for military battlefield surgical application, according to the hospital.

It is FDA-approved for use in minimally invasive urologic surgical procedures, general laparoscopic surgical procedures, gynecologic laparoscopic surgical procedures, general non-cardiovascular thoracoscopic surgical procedures and thoracoscopically assisted cardiotomy procedures.

Potential patients who would like more information on surgical options at Scottsdale Healthcare can call (480) 323-3350 or [visit www.shc.org](http://www.shc.org).