

UCI Healthcare first in the West to use robotic-assisted surgery for thyroid tumor

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UC Irvine Healthcare is the first medical center on the West Coast and the only one in California to perform robotic thyroidectomies, a procedure that removes the diseased gland without leaving a visible scar on the neck. Dr. Jason Kim, associate clinical professor of otolaryngology and a head and neck cancer specialist, has performed robotic-assisted surgery using the daVinci Surgical System on three patients with thyroid tumors.

"We're excited to be able to offer this kind of [surgery](#) to the Orange County community and beyond," Kim said. "Traditional 'open' surgery to remove the [thyroid gland](#) requires a three- to five-inch incision across the front of the neck, and other minimally invasive surgical techniques can reduce the scar to about one inch. But using the robot, we avoid the neck incision altogether by making a small, easily hidden cut in the patient's armpit. That opening provides access for the robot's arms, which then are maneuvered by the surgeon to the thyroid bed."

Kim and UCI oncologic surgeon Dr. John Butler are two of a select number of doctors in the world who were trained in robotic thyroidectomy using the daVinci robot earlier this year in South Korea. In addition to treating thyroid tumors and [cancer](#), the technique could be useful for other conditions such as hyperthyroidism.

"This is an important addition to services in our new Robotic Oncology Center at UCI," said Dr. Ralph Clayman, dean of the UCI School of Medicine and an internationally recognized expert in minimally invasive

renal cancer surgery. "The center, which focuses on the specific application of robotic technology to [cancer surgery](#), enables us to continually advance this exciting new technology and create university-led innovations for the betterment of every patient who seeks our care."

Surgery using the daVinci robot has been performed for years in heart, prostate and gynecologic conditions, but minimally invasive robotic thyroidectomies are new. The American Cancer Society estimates that about 38,000 cases of thyroid cancer alone in addition to other thyroid diseases will be diagnosed in the U.S. in 2010, and it usually strikes people younger than 55.

"The good news is that thyroid cancer is among the most curable of malignancies, with most patients cured from treatment and the vast majority of patients living a normal lifespan," said Dr. William Armstrong, professor and chair of UCI's otolaryngology department. "But since the location of the thyroidectomy scar from open surgery can be very visible, the cosmetic effects of the operation were a serious concern for patients who tend to be between the ages of 20 and 50. Robotic-assisted surgery changes all that."

Next on the horizon for the Robotic Oncology Center are procedures to treat stomach and colorectal cancers and the expansion of gynecologic cancer treatment. The center is part of UCI's Chao Family Comprehensive Cancer Center, one of only 40 National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer centers in the U.S. and the only one in Orange County.

Provided by University of California - Irvine

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