

# ROBOTIC SURGERY

## HELPS PROSTATE CANCER PATIENT recover in record time

After Randy Nick found out he had prostate cancer, he knew he wanted the kind of treatment that would give him the quickest recovery possible. The diagnosis came in spring 2009 and Randy couldn't bear the thought of missing golf season.

When his physician, Kevin Gee, MD, urologist on staff at Community Memorial Hospital, suggested he use the da Vinci Surgical System to remove Randy's prostate, the 52-year-old immediately gave his consent. "Working in manufacturing, I know all about robots," said Randy, who is vice president of operations at Butler Wire & Metal Products in Menomonee Falls. "They're just so accurate."

The biggest advantages of choosing robotic-assisted, minimally invasive surgery over traditional open surgery is that the recovery time is significantly shorter and there is less blood loss and pain. That was certainly true in Randy's case – he was back on the course just weeks after his surgery.

### Greater Precision With Robotic Surgery

Randy, of Sussex, began seeing Dr. Gee about six years ago. His father and cousin had prostate cancer and his uncle died from the disease, so he knew there was a high possibility he would get prostate cancer. Dr. Gee regularly performed digital rectal exams and tested the level of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) in Randy's blood. When the blood tests returned abnormal results, Gee ordered biopsies to look for cancer. In 2009, the biopsy showed prostate enlargement and early prostate cancer. While the cancer was confined to Randy's prostate, it was moderately high grade, which meant it would be dangerous if left untreated.

"Having a family history of prostate cancer, you think you're prepared for the diagnosis," Randy said. "But when he told me he got the biopsy back and it was cancer, I couldn't breathe."

"Randy was certain he wanted surgery, and he also wanted to recover as quickly as possible," Dr. Gee said. "There is a technological appeal to the robotic-assisted prostatectomy, but even more than that there is definitely a quicker recovery time, which is why we decided to go that route."

Dr. Gee put Randy under general anesthesia for the surgery, which lasted several hours. He inflated Randy's abdomen with carbon dioxide to create an operating space, made six small incisions in the abdomen and inserted ports to keep the incisions open. Using the ports, Dr. Gee inserted laparoscopic surgical instruments and a video camera into Randy's abdomen to more easily see and dissect the prostate. He controlled the robotic "arms" from a console about 10 feet away from the operating table.

"Robotic surgery allows me to have surgical precision and 3-D visualization and magnification," Dr. Gee said. "When I make large movements with my hands, they are translated into small movements for the robotic arm, which is how I am able to achieve such precision. In addition, because the surgery is minimally invasive, my patients experience less blood loss."

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### An "Astronomically Fast" Recovery

Dr. Gee was able to remove all of Randy's prostate. Because the surgery was so successful, he did not need further treatment other than frequent blood tests. He also had a very short recovery time. After a late afternoon Thursday surgery, he spent two nights in the hospital and was back to work on Monday. He only needed a catheter for a week, compared to the two weeks that men who have had open surgery typically need a catheter.

Just two weeks after Randy's surgery, he was practicing his golf swing. Three weeks post-surgery he was back on the course, and less than a month after his prostatectomy, he was playing rounds. "The recovery time was astronomically fast," Randy said. "I had been so worried about missing the golf season, but I had all summer to work on my game. I was even traveling to Ohio for a tournament right away."

Randy also experienced very little pain with the surgery. "Last year I blew out my knee and needed surgery," he said. "That was pain. This was nothing. I didn't even have to take my pain medication."

Most men experience some challenges with incontinence and return of sexual function after prostate surgery. However, Randy and Dr. Gee are on their way to resolving these issues.

### Similar Outcomes for Open and Robotic-Assisted Surgery

While Dr. Gee performs 80 percent of his prostate cancer surgeries using robotic assistance, he still believes open surgery is comparable to robotic-assisted surgery. "I think either type of surgery is a great option," he said. "In my practice, when I look at my patients one year after removing their prostates, I have seen the same success with cancer control and quality of life between the two surgeries."

"However," he added, "the early recovery is generally better with robotic surgery. That's important for people who are active or those who can't afford to be gone from work for four to six weeks."

The only men for whom Dr. Gee prefers open surgery are those who have high-grade, high-risk disease; extremely large prostates; multiple prior abdominal surgeries; or men who would not be able to tolerate the extra hour required for robotic surgery.

Randy is thrilled he was able to have minimally invasive prostate surgery, and he is even happier that the surgery was such a success. "I'm really grateful for Dr. Gee and his staff," he said. "They were so on top of my disease, and that is why I am here today."



Kevin Gee, MD, is one of five urologists on staff at Community Memorial Hospital who perform robotic-assisted surgery for prostatectomies. Robotic-assisted surgery is the latest advance in surgery to remove the prostate and offers many benefits. For more information, call Careconnection at 262-251-1001 or 800-246-8332, or visit [communitymemorial.com](http://communitymemorial.com).