

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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SURGICAL ROBOT ASSISTS UT SOUTHWESTERN PHYSICIANS

DALLAS – July 27, 2000 – Dr. Jeffrey Cadeddu’s new partner in the operating room never tires, is available 24 hours a day and never went to medical school.

Aesop, the first surgical robot approved by the Food and Drug Administration, leads Cadeddu through surgery by directing a camera inserted through a tiny incision in the patient’s abdomen. With Aesop’s assistance in laparoscopic surgery, Cadeddu, assistant professor of urology at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, can now avoid large incisions and rely on Aesop to help him with the procedure.

Aesop assists in surgery primarily by holding a camera that gives surgeons a clear view of where they are working. Aesop takes pictures and directs surgeons where they need to go – all through a tiny incision less than an inch long. In the past, a member of the operating team directed the camera, a tiring and expensive job.

“With Aesop, we don’t have an extra person in the operating room holding the camera,” Cadeddu said. “Aesop is also more reliable – it doesn’t get tired after three hours of surgery.”

But the key benefit is that patients can take advantage of laparoscopic surgery, also called minimally invasive surgery. In laparoscopic surgery, the operation is performed through several tiny holes rather than one long incision. With less trauma to the patient, pain and recovery times are greatly reduced.

Surgeons direct Aesop either manually through a foot pedal or with a voice-activation system. With one arm and an attached camera, Aesop is only used in certain types of procedures. At UT southwestern, Aesop is used primarily in urological procedures.

But Cadeddu says the robot, made of aluminum and black plastic, is only just the beginning.

“Surgery is definitely moving toward using more robotic devices,” he said. “They can help minimize trauma to the patient.”

But robots can’t replace the human touch, Cadeddu said.

“These are skill-enhancement devices,” he said. “They can’t replace a physician.”

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