

# New Technologies in Urology

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*Dedicated to our families and friends*

# Preface

Technology seems to be an integral part of modern living. Urologists have over the years embraced new technological advances for patient benefit. On some occasions, however, the initial enthusiasm in something new has failed to endure rigorous scientific scrutiny. Thus, while being technological leaders, we urologists know better than most other surgical specialties that what is new is not necessarily good.

This textbook is aimed at urologists and surgeons at all levels and has contributions from international experts. The topics vary from robotics to lasers to single port laparoscopy. The comprehensive chapters should be of equal interest to uro-oncologists and those involved in treating benign urological diseases. While the contents are meant to bring the reader up to date with technological advances, the authors have attempted to balance their enthusiasm with basic science, translational research, and clinical outcomes. It will be obvious that some of the subjects mentioned here, such as nanotechnology, are still evolving, and it will be a while before they undergo clinical trials that establish their position in clinical medicine.

We hope you enjoy reading this book as much as we have enjoyed creating it.

London, UK  
Dublin, Ireland  
London, UK  
CA, USA

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# Contents

<b>Part I Robots</b> .....	1
<b>1 Robotic-Assisted Laparoscopic Radical Prostatectomy</b> .....	3
Introduction to Robotics .....	3
History of Robotics .....	3
The da Vinci® Robotic System .....	3
Evolution of Minimally Invasive Laparoscopic Prostatectomy .....	4
Robotic-Assisted Laparoscopic Radical Prostatectomy (RALP) .....	4
Indications .....	4
RALP and the “Learning Curve” .....	5
Outcomes of RALP .....	5
Technical Refinements to Improve Early Postoperative Function Outcomes .....	8
Conclusion .....	9
References .....	9
<b>2 Robotic-Assisted Radical Cystectomy</b> .....	11
Introduction .....	11
Surgical Technique .....	11
Posterior Dissection .....	12
Lateral Dissection .....	12
Anterior Dissection .....	12
Lymphadenectomy, Transposition of Left Ureter .....	13
Urinary Diversion .....	13
Postoperative Care .....	14
Outcomes of RARC .....	14
Comparison of ORC and RARC .....	15
Comparison of ORC, LRC, and RARC .....	16
Oncological Outcomes .....	16
Quality of Life and Patient Satisfaction .....	16
Ergonomics .....	16
Conclusions .....	17
References .....	17
<b>3 Robotic Pyeloplasty</b> .....	19
Introduction .....	19
Patient Presentation, Diagnosis, Indications, and Treatment Options .....	19
Preoperative Evaluation and Management .....	20
Surgical Approach .....	21
Operating Room Setup .....	21
Surgical Site and Trocar Placement .....	22
Exposure of the Ureteropelvic Junction .....	22

Pyeloplasty . . . . .	23
Closure . . . . .	23
Immediate Postoperative Course . . . . .	23
Complications . . . . .	24
Outcomes . . . . .	24
Follow-Up . . . . .	25
Special Considerations . . . . .	25
Concomitant Nephrolithiasis . . . . .	25
Horseshoe Kidney . . . . .	25
Conclusion . . . . .	25
References . . . . .	26
<b>4 Robotic-Assisted Laparoscopic Partial Nephrectomy . . . . .</b>	<b>27</b>
Introduction . . . . .	27
Indications for Procedure . . . . .	27
Procedure . . . . .	28
Room Setup . . . . .	28
Patient Preparation . . . . .	28
Anesthetic Considerations . . . . .	28
Prophylaxis . . . . .	28
Cystoscopic Ureteral Catheter Insertion . . . . .	28
Colonic Mobilization . . . . .	30
Mobilization of the Kidney . . . . .	31
Preparation of the Hilum for En Bloc Clamping . . . . .	31
Defatting of the Kidney . . . . .	32
Intraoperative Ultrasonography . . . . .	32
Docking of the Robotic Cart . . . . .	32
Application of the Satinsky Clamp . . . . .	32
Tumor Excision . . . . .	32
Parenchymal Suture Placement . . . . .	33
Complications . . . . .	34
Future Directions . . . . .	35
Conclusion . . . . .	35
References . . . . .	35
<b>5 Robotic Sacral Colpopexy . . . . .</b>	<b>37</b>
Introduction . . . . .	37
Patient Evaluation . . . . .	37
Operative Technique . . . . .	38
Comparative Outcomes with Robotic Abdominal Sacral Colpopexy . . . . .	40
Conclusion . . . . .	41
References . . . . .	41
<b>6 Principles of Robotic-Assisted Surgery in Children . . . . .</b>	<b>43</b>
Introduction . . . . .	43
Pediatric Surgeons and Telerobotics . . . . .	43
Personal Experience . . . . .	44
Advantages and Limitations of Pediatric Robotics . . . . .	45
Operative Considerations . . . . .	45
Conclusions . . . . .	47
References . . . . .	47
<b>7 Emerging Robotics . . . . .</b>	<b>49</b>
Introduction . . . . .	49
Robotic Developmental Directions . . . . .	49
Force Sensing and Tissue Identification: Current and Future Developments . . . . .	49



Robotic Needle Placement . . . . .	52
Nanotechnology . . . . .	53
The Future of Surgical Robotic Science . . . . .	54
References . . . . .	55
<b>Part II Lasers . . . . .</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>8 The Holmium Laser in the Treatment of Benign Prostatic Enlargement. . . . .</b>	<b>59</b>
Introduction . . . . .	59
Physics of the Holmium Laser . . . . .	59
Holmium Laser and Benign Prostatic Enlargement. . . . .	59
HoLEP Procedure . . . . .	59
Comparative Trials vs. TURP . . . . .	61
Perioperative Morbidity . . . . .	61
Operating Time . . . . .	61
Delayed Morbidity . . . . .	61
Sexual Function . . . . .	62
Urodynamic Evaluation . . . . .	62
PSA Reduction . . . . .	62
Histology . . . . .	62
Hospital Stay . . . . .	62
HoLEP vs. Open Prostatectomy . . . . .	62
HoLEP Durability . . . . .	62
Large Prostates . . . . .	63
Learning Curve . . . . .	63
Economics/Cost Effectiveness . . . . .	63
Other Holmium Laser Techniques . . . . .	63
Holmium Laser Bladder Neck Incision (HoBNI) . . . . .	63
Holmium Laser Ablation of the Prostate (HoLAP) . . . . .	64
Holmium Laser Resection of the Prostate . . . . .	64
Conclusion . . . . .	64
References . . . . .	64
<b>9 Lasers and Urinary Calculi. . . . .</b>	<b>67</b>
Background . . . . .	67
How Lasers Work. . . . .	67
Classification of Lasers . . . . .	67
Solid State . . . . .	68
Gas . . . . .	68
Dye . . . . .	68
Applications of Lasers in Urology . . . . .	68
Laser for Stone Management . . . . .	68
Lasers for Prostate Surgery . . . . .	69
Lasers for Transitional Cell Carcinoma . . . . .	69
Lasers for Stricture and PUJ Obstruction . . . . .	69
Comparison of Holmium Lithotripsy with Other Stone Treatments . . . . .	70
Lasers and Specific Stones . . . . .	70
Lasers and Pregnancy . . . . .	70
Safety Procedures . . . . .	70
Future Developments . . . . .	70
References . . . . .	70
<b>10 Lasers for Bladder Tumors . . . . .</b>	<b>71</b>
Introduction . . . . .	71
Laser Technology in Treatment of Bladder Tumors . . . . .	71
General Features of Lasers . . . . .	71

Advantages of lasers in the Treatment of Bladder Tumors . . . . .	71
Disadvantages of Lasers in the Treatment of Bladder Tumors . . . . .	72
Specific Types of Lasers . . . . .	72
Neodymium: YAG . . . . .	72
KTP: YAG . . . . .	73
Holmium: YAG . . . . .	73
Thulium: YAG . . . . .	73
Methods of Using Lasers for Treatment of Bladder Tumors . . . . .	73
Ablation . . . . .	73
Laser Ablation Under General/Regional Anesthetic . . . . .	73
Laser Ablation Under Local Anesthetic . . . . .	74
Resection . . . . .	75
Combined Gene and Laser Therapy: A Novel Strategy . . . . .	77
Conclusion . . . . .	77
References . . . . .	77
<b>11 Lasers in Laparoscopic Surgery . . . . .</b>	<b>79</b>
Introduction . . . . .	79
Laser Physics . . . . .	79
Laser Types . . . . .	80
Laparoscopic Pyeloplasty . . . . .	81
Laser Laparoscopic Partial Nephrectomy . . . . .	82
Laser Laparoscopic Radical Prostatectomy . . . . .	85
Conclusion . . . . .	87
References . . . . .	88
<b>Part III Other New Technologies . . . . .</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>12 Cryosurgical Ablation for Prostate Cancer . . . . .</b>	<b>93</b>
Introduction . . . . .	93
Aims of Treatment for Early Prostate Cancer . . . . .	93
The History and Development of Cryosurgery for Prostate Cancer . . . . .	93
Mechanism of Tissue Injury in Prostate Cryotherapy . . . . .	94
Physical Parameters in Prostate Cryotherapy . . . . .	95
Freezing Rate . . . . .	95
Target Temperature . . . . .	95
Thawing Rate . . . . .	95
Duration of Freezing . . . . .	95
Repetition of the Freeze–Thaw Cycle . . . . .	95
Indications for Cryotherapy . . . . .	96
Primary Therapy for Organ Confined Disease . . . . .	96
Primary Therapy for Locally Advanced Disease . . . . .	96
Salvage Therapy After External Beam Radiotherapy or Brachytherapy . . . . .	96
Patient Selection for Primary Cryotherapy . . . . .	96
Patient Selection for Salvage Cryotherapy . . . . .	96
The Technique of Cryosurgical Ablation of the Prostate . . . . .	97
Primary Cryotherapy of the Prostate . . . . .	97
Complications of Primary Cryotherapy of the Prostate . . . . .	99
Oncological Results of Salvage Cryotherapy . . . . .	99
Complications of Salvage Cryotherapy Series . . . . .	99
Areas for Potential Advances in the Management of Organ Confined Prostate Cancer Using Cryotherapy . . . . .	100
Focal Nerve Sparing Cryotherapy . . . . .	100
Laser-Assisted Cryotherapy (LAC) . . . . .	100
Rectal Wall Protection . . . . .	100

Adjuvant Treatment with Cryotherapy . . . . .	101
Cryochemotherapy . . . . .	101
Cryo-Immunotherapy . . . . .	101
Conclusions . . . . .	101
References . . . . .	101
<b>13 Prostate Focal Therapy . . . . .</b>	<b>105</b>
Introduction . . . . .	105
Rationale of Focal Therapies . . . . .	105
Natural Evolution of Localized Prostate Cancer on Watchful Waiting . . . . .	105
Definitions for Focal Therapy of the Prostate . . . . .	105
Indications for Focal Therapies . . . . .	105
Clinical Staging of Prostate Cancer . . . . .	106
Prevalence of Unilateral Prostate Cancer . . . . .	106
Imaging . . . . .	107
MRI . . . . .	107
Contrast-Enhanced Doppler Ultrasound . . . . .	108
Focal Therapies for CAP . . . . .	108
Cryotherapy . . . . .	108
High-Intensity Focal Ultrasound (HIFU) . . . . .	110
Technologies in Development . . . . .	110
Follow-Up After Prostate Focal Therapy . . . . .	111
Outcomes Expected From Focal Ablative Therapy for Prostate Cancer . . . . .	112
Conclusions . . . . .	112
References . . . . .	112
<b>14 Radiofrequency Ablation . . . . .</b>	<b>115</b>
Introduction . . . . .	115
Mechanism of Radiofrequency Ablation . . . . .	115
Technical Considerations . . . . .	116
Anatomic and Tumor Considerations . . . . .	116
Indications . . . . .	117
Percutaneous RFA . . . . .	117
Laparoscopic RFA . . . . .	117
Postoperative Follow-Up and Imaging . . . . .	118
Safety and Complications . . . . .	119
Results . . . . .	120
Conclusion . . . . .	121
References . . . . .	121
<b>15 High-Intensity Focused Ultrasound in the Management of the Small Renal Mass . . . . .</b>	<b>123</b>
Introduction . . . . .	123
The History of HIFU . . . . .	123
Principles . . . . .	123
Heating and Cavitation . . . . .	123
Histological Assessment of Renal Ablation . . . . .	125
Methods of Targeting HIFU Treatments . . . . .	125
Side-Effects and Limitations . . . . .	126
HIFU Devices . . . . .	127
HIFU in the Kidney . . . . .	127
Extracorporeal HIFU in the Management of Small Kidney Tumors . . . . .	128
Laparoscopic HIFU for the Small Renal Mass . . . . .	128
Conclusion . . . . .	130
References . . . . .	130

<b>16 Prostate High-Intensity Focused Ultrasound</b> .....	133
Introduction .....	133
Basic Science .....	133
Transrectal Devices for Treating the Prostate .....	134
Ablatherm .....	135
Sonablate 500 .....	135
HIFU Treatment of Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia .....	137
HIFU in the Treatment of Primary Localized Prostate Cancer .....	138
HIFU as Salvage Treatment of Radiorecurrent Prostate Cancer .....	141
Focal Therapy .....	142
Conclusion .....	144
Conflicts of Interest .....	144
References .....	144
<b>17 Tissue Bioengineering</b> .....	147
Introduction .....	147
Kidney .....	148
Bladder .....	148
Ureter .....	149
Urethra .....	149
Penis .....	150
Testes .....	150
Vagina .....	151
Uterus .....	152
Ovary .....	152
Injectable Therapies .....	152
Conclusion .....	152
References .....	153
<b>18 Renal Radiosurgery</b> .....	155
Introduction .....	155
Application of Radiation Therapy .....	155
Radiosurgery .....	156
Radiosurgical Technologies .....	156
Radiosurgery Outcomes .....	157
Conclusion .....	158
References .....	158
<b>19 Hydro-Jet Technology</b> .....	161
Introduction .....	161
Hydrodissection Principle .....	161
New Clinical Applications in Urology .....	162
Robotic-Assisted Laparoscopic Radical Prostatectomy with Hemostatic Hydrodissection of the Neurovascular Bundles .....	162
Robotic-Assisted Laparoscopic Partial Nephrectomy Without Vascular Clamping .....	163
Future Goals .....	164
Conclusion .....	164
References .....	164
<b>20 Chronic Tissue Expansion</b> .....	165
Tissue Expansion Physiology .....	165
Tissue Expansion In Urinary Tract .....	166
Clinical Study .....	171
Clinical Implications .....	172
References .....	172

<b>21</b>	<b>Technologies for Imaging the Neurovascular Bundle</b>	
	<b>During Prostatectomy</b> . . . . .	175
	History of the Neurovascular Bundle. . . . .	175
	Revisiting the Anatomy of the Neurovascular Bundle . . . . .	176
	Changes in the Technique of Neurovascular Bundle Preservation . . . . .	177
	Efforts to Achieve Intraoperative Mapping of the Neurovascular Bundle. . . . .	177
	CaverMap Surgical Aid . . . . .	178
	Intraoperative Transrectal Ultrasound . . . . .	178
	Optical Coherence Tomography . . . . .	179
	Neuropack Nerve Stimulator . . . . .	180
	Animal Studies to Map Neurovascular Bundle . . . . .	180
	Confocal Fluorescent Microscopy . . . . .	180
	Near-Infrared Fluorescence Imaging . . . . .	182
	Future Directions . . . . .	182
	Conclusion . . . . .	182
	References . . . . .	182
	<b>Part IV Laparoscopic New Technologies</b> . . . . .	185
<b>22</b>	<b>Laparoscopic Partial Nephrectomy</b> . . . . .	187
	Introduction . . . . .	187
	Beyond Radiographic Diagnosis: Molecular	
	Markers may help Spare Nephrons . . . . .	187
	3D CT Scanning. . . . .	187
	Excision Devices for LPN . . . . .	188
	Delineation of Tumor from Normal Parenchyma . . . . .	190
	Renorrhaphy. . . . .	190
	Image Overlay and Augmented Reality. . . . .	191
	Single-Port Partial Nephrectomy. . . . .	192
	Temporary, Reversible Super-Selective Vascular Occlusion . . . . .	192
	Assessment of Acute Renal Injury. . . . .	192
	Conclusion . . . . .	194
	References . . . . .	195
<b>23</b>	<b>New Advances in Urologic Laparoendoscopic</b>	
	<b>Single Site (LESS) Surgery</b> . . . . .	197
	Introduction . . . . .	197
	The History of LESS Surgery . . . . .	197
	Nomenclature. . . . .	198
	Instruments and Technology . . . . .	198
	Access Devices . . . . .	198
	Instruments . . . . .	200
	Camera Devices . . . . .	201
	LESS Surgery Clinical Experience. . . . .	201
	Robotics . . . . .	205
	Novel Approaches . . . . .	206
	Future Directions . . . . .	206
	References . . . . .	206
<b>24</b>	<b>Notes</b> . . . . .	209
	Introduction . . . . .	209
	History . . . . .	209
	Transgastric NOTES . . . . .	209
	Transvaginal and Transanal NOTES . . . . .	210
	Transesophageal NOTES. . . . .	210
	Transumbilical NOTES . . . . .	210

The Hybrid Technique . . . . .	210
EUS-Guided NOTES . . . . .	211
R-NOTES (Robotic Natural Orifice Transluminal Surgery) . . . . .	211
Training . . . . .	211
NOTES and Urology . . . . .	211
Benefits of NOTES . . . . .	212
Challenges . . . . .	212
Conclusion . . . . .	213
References . . . . .	213
<b>25 Augmented Reality for Image-Guided Surgery in Urology . . . . .</b>	<b>215</b>
Introduction . . . . .	215
Augmented Reality . . . . .	215
Initiation of Image-Guided Surgery in Urology . . . . .	216
Devices and Techniques for the AR System . . . . .	216
The AR System in Operation Room . . . . .	217
Preoperative Calibration of the TRUS Probe . . . . .	218
Preoperative Calibration of the Entire System of 3-D Reconstruction and AR . . . . .	219
US Image Acquisition and Segmentation for 3-D Model Construction . . . . .	219
Registration System of Preoperative Imaging and Tracking . . . . .	220
Initial Clinical Experience of the AR System in Urology . . . . .	220
Conclusion . . . . .	221
References . . . . .	221
<b>26 Advances in Imaging . . . . .</b>	<b>223</b>
Kidney . . . . .	223
Indeterminate Renal Mass . . . . .	223
Urolithiasis . . . . .	224
Urothelial Imaging . . . . .	225
Minimally Invasive Therapy . . . . .	225
Nephron Sparing Surgery . . . . .	226
Ureter . . . . .	226
Cross-Sectional Imaging . . . . .	226
Endoscopic Ultrasound . . . . .	226
Miscellaneous . . . . .	226
Functional MR Imaging of the Kidneys . . . . .	226
Image-Augmented Intraoperative Navigation . . . . .	227
Prostate . . . . .	227
Prostate Cancer . . . . .	227
Color/Power Doppler Ultrasound . . . . .	227
Contrast-Enhanced Ultrasound . . . . .	227
Elastography . . . . .	228
3D . . . . .	228
Dynamic Contrast-Enhanced MRI . . . . .	228
Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopic Imaging (MRSI) . . . . .	229
Diffusion Imaging . . . . .	229
Elastography . . . . .	229
Conventional MRI vs. 3T MRI . . . . .	229
MRI-Guided Biopsy . . . . .	230
MRI/CT Image Augmented Intraoperative Navigation . . . . .	230
Monitoring Response . . . . .	230
Testes . . . . .	231
Ultrasound . . . . .	231
CT/PET . . . . .	231
References . . . . .	231

<b>27</b>	<b>Advances in Diagnostic and Therapeutic Ultrasonography</b> .....	235
	Introduction .....	235
	Recent Technical Advances in B-Mode Ultrasonography .....	235
	Technical Innovations for Improved Resolution .....	235
	Technical Innovations for Improved Lesion Detection and Differentiation .....	237
	Other Technical Innovations .....	238
	Applications of Novel Ultrasonography Technologies in Urology .....	239
	Prostate .....	239
	Kidney .....	244
	Other Organs of the Urogenital System .....	246
	References .....	248
<b>28</b>	<b>Telementoring</b> .....	251
	Introduction .....	251
	History .....	251
	Setup .....	252
	Time Delay .....	252
	Robotics .....	253
	Aesop .....	253
	Socrates .....	253
	Paky .....	253
	Zeus .....	253
	Da Vinci .....	254
	Applications .....	254
	Long-Distance and International Applications .....	254
	Naval Applications .....	255
	Applications in Space .....	255
	Limitations .....	255
	Establishing Centers for Telemedicine .....	256
	Future .....	256
	References .....	257
<b>29</b>	<b>Simulation in Urology</b> .....	259
	Introduction .....	259
	History of Surgical Simulation .....	259
	Role of Simulation in Education .....	259
	Types of Simulators .....	260
	Assessment of Simulators .....	261
	Simulators for Urology Training .....	261
	Simulators for Laparoscopic Surgery .....	262
	Box Trainers .....	262
	Hybrid Trainers .....	262
	Virtual Reality .....	263
	Turp Simulators .....	264
	Cystoscopy and Ureteroscopy .....	265
	Percutaneous Nephrolithotomy (PCNL) .....	265
	Conclusion .....	266
	References .....	266
<b>30</b>	<b>Nanotechnology</b> .....	269
	Introduction .....	269
	Definitions .....	269
	Technical Aspects of Nanotechnology .....	269
	Miniaturization of Medical Robotics .....	269
	Teleoperation and Actuation .....	270

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Power Supply . . . . .	270
Communication . . . . .	270
Nanoelectronics Manufacturing . . . . .	270
Nanobiosensors . . . . .	271
Biocompatibility . . . . .	271
A Platform for Nanosurgery: Nanorobot	
Hardware Architecture . . . . .	271
Nanorobot Surgical Applications . . . . .	272
Cancer . . . . .	272
Urological Applications of Nanotechnology . . . . .	272
Nanobiosensors . . . . .	272
Nanotechnology-Enhanced Imaging Techniques . . . . .	273
Nanotechnology and Prostate Cancer . . . . .	273
Nanotechnology in Urological Surgery . . . . .	273
Conclusion . . . . .	274
References . . . . .	274



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**Part**  
**Robots**

Prokar Dasgupta and Roger Kirby

# Robotic-Assisted Laparoscopic Radical Prostatectomy

Rafael Ferreira Coelho, Geoff Coughlin, and Vipul R. Patel

## Introduction to Robotics

### History of Robotics

The word “robot” was originally coined by Karel Capek in his play, Rossum’s universal robots, in 1921.<sup>1</sup> It is derived from the Czechoslovakian term *robota*, meaning forced work. His original vision dealt with a world in which robots help humans with everyday tasks but eventually turn on their masters and attempt world domination. The first truly robotic flexible arm, known as the Programmable Universal Manipulation Arm (PUMA), was developed in 1978, by Victor Scheinman, and quickly became the industry standard. The first surgical application of this technology was in 1985 when the PUMA 560 was used to orientate a needle for a radiologically guided brain biopsy.<sup>2</sup> Soon after, robots were utilized in other surgeries including the PROBOT, to perform transurethral resection of the prostate, and the ROBODOC, for use in hip replacements.<sup>3–6</sup>

The contemporary generation of surgical robots consists of “master–slave” systems made by Intuitive Surgical Inc.

(Sunnyvale, CA). These systems resulted from research initially conducted by the Stanford Research Institute, the National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA), and the Department of Defense. The concept of surgeons being able to perform surgery from a remote location with use of such a master–slave system would be optimal for use in space travel for astronauts and to remove specialist surgeons from the battlefield.<sup>7</sup>

### The da Vinci® Robotic System

The da Vinci is an advanced master–slave robotic system. The basic principle involves control of three or four robotic arms by a surgeon sitting at a remote console. The system has three components: (a) a surgeon console, (b) a surgical robot with three or four arms, and (c) an endoscopic stack (Fig. 1.1). The console contains the master tool manipulators, the visual supply, and foot pedals for camera and tool manipulation. The surgeon’s hands are inserted in the free-moving finger controls (masters). These controls convert



**Fig. 1.1** The da Vinci S surgical system. The three components are shown: the surgeon console, the 4-armed surgical robot, and the endoscopic stack. Courtesy Intuitive Surgical, CA

the movements of the surgeon's fingertips and wrist into electrical signals. These signals are translated to computer commands that direct the robot to replicate the movements with the robotic instruments in the operative field. The console is connected to the video and surgical component of the robot via cables. The patient-side surgical robot has an arm to control the camera and two or three arms to hold the operating instruments. These instruments are articulated at the wrist and have seven degrees of freedom and two degrees of axial rotation. This master–slave robotic system overcomes many of the limitations of conventional laparoscopy. It provides the surgeon with 3D 10× magnified vision, wristed instrumentation, tremor filtration, and motion scaling. The system produces an *immersive telerobotic environment* ideally suited for surgical precision and reconstructive applications.

## Evolution of Minimally Invasive Laparoscopic Prostatectomy

Data from the Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) registry indicate that the incidence of prostate cancer in men under 50 years of age has risen over the past 10 years, with an annual increase of 9.5%.<sup>8</sup> Prostate cancer accounts today for nearly 33% of all newly diagnosed cancers in men.<sup>9</sup> For patients with prostate confined disease, a number of treatment alternatives are now available. However, radical prostatectomy (RP) remains the gold standard for long-term cure.<sup>10</sup> Since its first description in 1905 by Young, RP procedure has been associated with significant perioperative morbidity, including excessive blood loss, urinary incontinence, and impotency.<sup>11</sup> In the late 1970s and early 1980s, several detailed anatomic studies provided important insights into the periprostatic anatomy, especially that of the dorsal venous complex,<sup>12</sup> neurovascular bundle,<sup>13</sup> and striated urethral sphincter.<sup>14</sup> These observations allowed the development of an anatomic approach to radical prostatectomy with significant reduction in operative morbidity.

With the increasing use of screening for prostate cancer detection, younger and healthier men are presently being diagnosed with the condition. These patients desire treatments that not only provide good oncological and functional outcomes but also treatments that can also be performed in a minimally invasive nature with short hospitalization times and minimal convalescence. In an effort to further decrease the morbidity of open radical prostatectomy, a minimally invasive surgical approach was first described by Schuessler and colleagues in 1997.<sup>15</sup> These authors performed the first successful laparoscopic radical prostatectomy (LRP). With their initial experience, the authors noted the challenging nature of the operation with long operative times and

hospital stays. The operation was advanced in the late 1990s, as European surgeons tackled the difficult learning curve and reported feasibility with results comparable with the open surgical approach.<sup>16–18</sup> Despite this, the technical demands of the surgery and the protracted learning curve has prevented the widespread adoption of LRP by most urologic surgeons.

The recent introduction of advanced robotic devices such as the da Vinci Surgical System (Intuitive Surgical, Inc., Sunnyvale, CA) has simplified complex laparoscopic procedures and added new hopes of reducing operative times and the learning curve for a minimally invasive approach to radical prostatectomy.<sup>19</sup> Robotically assisted laparoscopic radical prostatectomy (RALP) offers the additional advantages of 10× magnified three-dimensional visualization, motion scaling with tremor filtration, improved surgical ergonomics and miniature wristed, articulating instruments with 7-degrees of freedom. The surgeon can dissect with improved operative precision and robotic technology greatly simplifies the reconstructive element of the procedure. The first robotic prostatectomy was performed in 2000 by Binder and Kramer in Germany.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently, the procedure has undergone significant innovation and improvement. Menon, Guillonnet, and Vallancien refined the technique at Henry Ford Hospital later in the same year and its growth has been exponential since then.<sup>21</sup>

## Robotic-Assisted Laparoscopic Radical Prostatectomy (RALP)

### Indications

The indications for RALP are identical to that for open surgery. Patients with clinical stage T2 or less prostate cancer with no evidence of metastasis, either clinically or radiographically, are candidates for RALP. Absolute contraindications include uncorrectable bleeding diatheses, increased intracranial pressure, or the inability to undergo general anesthesia due to severe cardiopulmonary compromise.

Some predictable situations provide a technical challenge to the entire robotic operative team. Though these scenarios certainly are not contraindications, they should be avoided by inexperienced teams during their initial experience with the procedure. These scenarios include patients with: prior major abdominal or pelvic surgery, morbid obesity, large prostate size, prior TURP, presence of a median lobe, prior pelvic irradiation, neoadjuvant hormonal therapy, or a history of prostatitis. As the experience of the robotic team increases, these challenging scenarios can be approached with more skill and confidence.



**Table 1.1** Criteria for selection of ideal initial patients

Prostate size: 60 g
BMI < 30
No previous prostatic or abdominal surgery
Erectile dysfunction
Low-risk disease: PSA < 10 ng/mL, Gleason score <7, cT1 or T2a
No androgen ablation therapy or history of prostatitis

The ideal criteria for patient selection during the initial learning curve for RALP are shown in Table 1.1. From an oncological and functional viewpoint, patients with low-risk disease and erectile dysfunction are ideal. These characteristics reduce the risk of positive surgical margins and nerve sparing is a less important operative consideration. From a technical standpoint, patients with a BMI < 30, no prior abdominal surgery, prostate size < 60 g with no prior TURP, no median lobe, no prior androgen ablation, and no history of prostatitis is desirable. By eliminating these predictable challenges, the technical aspect of the operation is simplified. As experience is gained, these factors become less important considerations. This stepladder approach allows the surgeon to continually develop skills to deal with even the most challenging patients.

### **RALP and the “Learning Curve”**

As robotic technology is introduced to surgery, there is a time period where surgeons develop the knowledge and skills required to utilize the technology with efficiency. This time is generally referred to as the learning curve and can be reduced by factors such as standardization of the surgical procedure, specialized resident or fellowship training, or case proctorship/mentorship. Initial reports on the learning curve for RALP suggested that approximately 20 cases were required for the surgeon to acquire basic proficiency at the procedure.<sup>22–24</sup> With increasing experience and standardization of the operation, it has become evident that far greater experience is required for the surgeon to be confident and provide good patient outcomes.<sup>25</sup>

### **Outcomes of RALP**

#### **Intraoperative Outcomes**

Berryhill et al<sup>26</sup> reviewed the outcomes of radical prostatectomy via robotic, laparoscopic, and open approaches. Twenty-two robotic prostatectomy series were identified

with pertinent reported outcomes. Many institutions were represented, including studies from Institute Mutualiste Montsouris (Paris, France), Goethe University of Frankfurt (Germany), Vattikuti Urology Institute (Detroit, Michigan), and University of California-Irvine. They found a mean operative time of 164 min (varying from 55 min to 13 h) for RALP. The mean EBL was 152 mL (range of means, 50–570 mL). The intraoperative and postoperative RALP transfusion rates were generally minimal, with a mean of 2.9% of cases requiring blood. This was compared favorably with LRP and open RP where mean EBL was 406 and 697 mL, respectively. The LRP studies reported a mean of 8.3% of cases requiring transfusion, while the open RP articles reported an even higher mean transfusion rate of 24%.

We reviewed our perioperative outcomes for fifteen hundred consecutive RALPs performed by a single surgeon (VRP).<sup>27</sup> Operative times fell with increasing experience of both the surgeon and team. While some of our initial cases were between 4 and 6 h, our operative times have averaged 105 min over the last 300 cases. Mean EBL was 111 mL (50–500) with no patient requiring intraoperative transfusion and 0.4% of patients receiving postoperative transfusion. Two rectal injuries occurred during the initial 25 cases that were recognized intraoperatively and repaired with no sequelae.

The comparative results for operative time and blood loss from some different robotic series are presented in Table 1.2.

#### **Postoperative Complications**

The same current review by Berryhill and colleagues reported a mean overall postoperative complication rate for RALP of 6.6%.<sup>26</sup> This is consistent with our findings where 63 of our first 1,500 patients (4.3%) suffered a perioperative complication.<sup>27</sup> As our experience progresses, we have observed a decreased trend in complications from 9.3% in the first 300 to 2.6% in the last 300 cases. In addition, more than half of the radiologically detected anastomotic leaks occurred during the first 300 patients. Though complications such as anastomotic leaks and rectal injury disappeared relatively early in our learning curve, occasional complications such as MI, DVT/PE, and postoperative bleed continue to occur sporadically at a low rate.

#### **Oncological Outcomes**

Given that the first RALP was performed in 2000, data regarding long-term cancer-specific survival will not be matured for some time. Likewise, evidence for biochemical recurrence free survival is also sparse. At present, positive surgical margin rates are being used as a surrogate marker to assess the oncological efficacy of RALP.



**Table 1.2** RALP outcomes

Study (reference)	N	Age (year)	OR Time (minutes)	Mean EBL (mL)	Positive margin rate (%)			Continenence outcomes			Potency outcomes		
					pT2	pT3	Overall	Time of assessment (months)	Continenence rate (%)	Time of assessment (months)	BNS % intercourse	UNS % intercourse	Percentage of intercourse
Ahlering et al <sup>28</sup>	45	61.4 (46–71)	209 (150–600)	145 (25–350)	14.8	62.5	35.5	3	81	<12	33	0	33
Bentas et al <sup>29</sup>	40	61.3 (45–72)	500 (246–780)	570 (100–2,500)	8	67	30	3	84	12	–	–	21.1
Tewari et al <sup>30</sup>	200	59.9 (42–76)	160 (71–315)	153 (25–750)	–	–	6	6	96	<12	50	–	50
Wolfram et al <sup>31</sup>	81	62.9 (43–78)	250 (150–390)	300 (100–1,500)	12.7	42	22	–	–	–	–	–	–
Ahlering et al <sup>32</sup>	200	62.9 (43–78)	–	108 (25–400)	6.5	32	20.4	3	77	–	–	–	–
Ahlering et al <sup>33</sup>	109	56.1	–	92 (25–250)	–	–	13	–	–	<12	24.4	14.3	–
Chien et al <sup>34</sup>	56	58.9	356 (240–480)	356 (25–1,200)	–	–	10.7	–	–	12	35.7	40	40
Joseph et al <sup>35</sup>	50	59.6–1.6	202–38	206–63	–	–	12	3	90	<12	–	–	46
Menon et al <sup>36</sup>	1,142	60.2 (39–80)	154 (71–387)	142 (10–750)	–	–	13	12	95	12	97	74	–
Patel et al <sup>37</sup>	500	63.2	130 (51–330)	50 (10–300)	2.5	13.8	9.4	6	95	12	–	–	78
Tewari et al <sup>38</sup>	700	62.1	–	–	–	–	5.2	6	97	12	87	–	87
Badani et al <sup>39</sup>	2,766	–	154 (71–387)	142 (10–1,350)	13	35	12.3	–	–	12	79.2	–	79.2
Patel et al <sup>27</sup>	1,500	60.7	105	111	4	34	9.3	–	–	–	–	–	–

When stratified by pathological stage, positive margin rates following RALP range from 2.5 to 22% for pT2 and 13.5 to 67% for pT3 disease.<sup>27–29,32,37,39</sup> Only two prospective, nonrandomized comparative studies have compared robotic and open radical prostatectomy. They showed higher positive surgical margin rates in patients who had undergone open RP when compared with those treated with RALP.<sup>30,39</sup>

The overall positive margin rate for our first 1,500 cases was 9.3%.<sup>27</sup> When stratified for pathological stage, positive surgical margin rates were 4% for pT2, 34% for pT3, and 40% for pT4. The median Gleason score was 6 (range 5–10) and Gleason grade of 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 was found in 0.69, 2.78, 62.36, 26.68, 5.18, 2.16, and 0.15% of prostate specimens. Pathologic stage was T2a, T2b, T2c, T3a, T3b, and T4 in 15, 3.07, 60.23, 13.76, 5.69, and 1.46%, respectively.

In Henry Ford's series of 2,766 patients, the positive margin rate for pT2 tumors declined from 7% in the first 200 cases to 4% in the last 200.<sup>39</sup> The pT3 positive margin rate for the overall cohort was 35%, and the overall positive margin rate was 13%.

The oncological results based on positive surgical margins for RALP are very encouraging. The centers experienced at this procedure are reporting results as good as the best published series for open RP (Table 1.2).

### Functional Outcomes: Erectile Dysfunction

Mature data on erectile function after nerve-sparing RALP is presently limited. As more series mature in the near future, this information will be more abundant. Robotic-assisted surgery has the potential to improve nerve-sparing techniques during radical prostatectomy. Magnified stereoscopic vision, the relatively bloodless field provided by pneumoperitoneum, and the wristed instrumentation allow the surgeon to operate in a very precise manner during this intricate portion of the dissection. We find the benefits of robotic technology to be essential when performing our nerve preservation technique of “early retrograde release of the neurovascular bundles.” Utilizing this approach for bilateral nerve sparing on 98 consecutive patients with a preoperative SHIM score  $\geq 21$ , 87.7% were potent at 12 months follow-up with or without the use of oral PDE5 inhibitors. Using the same technique on 48 men with mild erectile dysfunction preoperatively (SHIM 17–20), 73% of men were potent 12 months postoperatively.<sup>40</sup>

The available 12-months follow-up data suggest that between 20 and 97% of patients regain potency after nerve-sparing RALP.<sup>26,29,36</sup> Comparing postoperative potency rates between different centers and different techniques is quite difficult. Varying definitions of “potent” combined with several methods of data collection introduce the potential for significant variations in outcomes.

Menon and colleagues at the Vattikuti Institute in Detroit, recently reported potency results for their technique of lateral prostatic fascia-sparing (Veil of Aphrodite) RALP.<sup>39</sup> Erectile function was measured with the SHIM questionnaire. Complete follow-up erectile function data were available for 910 patients. Preoperative SHIM scores were  $>17$  in 721 of 910 patients. Of these, 79.2% reported successful sexual intercourse postoperatively (defined as a SHIM score of at least 2 on the second question of the SHIM questionnaire: “When you had erections with sexual stimulation, how often were your erections hard enough for penetration?”). Phosphodiesterase-5 inhibitors (PDE5) were used in 44.2% of patients.

With regard to surgical technique, Ahlering et al demonstrated in a prospective, nonrandomized, comparative study that the adoption of a cautery-free technique for preservation of the neurovascular bundles produced a significantly higher potency rate 3 months postoperatively than the then standard bipolar cautery technique.<sup>33</sup> Erectile function was assessed through self-administered questionnaires and defined as erections sufficient for vaginal penetration with or without PDE-5 inhibitors. After 3 months of follow-up, 43% of men in the cautery-free group were potent when compared with 8.3% of the control group. At present, leading centers control the prostatic pedicle and perform nerve sparing without the use of any cautery.

According to the nonrandomized, comparative study of Tewari and colleagues,<sup>30</sup> RALP could allow better and earlier potency recovery when compared with open RP. These authors reported a prospective comparison between 100 open RPs and 200 RALPs. They demonstrated a more rapid return of erections with RALP (50% at a mean follow-up of 180 days vs. 50% at a mean of 440 days after open RP) as well as a quicker return to intercourse with RALP (50% at 340 days vs. 50% at 700 days for open RP).

The potency rates in various RALP series are shown in Table 1.2.

### Functional Outcomes: Urinary Incontinence

As for erectile function, direct comparisons for urinary continence between different prostatectomy series are difficult due to variations in definitions, data collection methods, and length of follow-up. Despite these difficulties, current literature suggests both a quicker return to urinary continence as well as slightly improved overall continence rate with RALP when compared with both open RP and LRP.

In our earlier series of 500 patients, we reported continence rates of 89, 95, and 97% at 3, 6, and 12 months postoperatively.<sup>37</sup> Continence was defined as the use of no absorbent pads. Twenty-seven percent of these patients were continent immediately after catheter removal. The improved

visualization of robotics aids in preserving the urethral sphincter and functional urethral length during the apical dissection of RALP. We feel that these factors along with the addition of some key technical refinements (described subsequently) are of utmost importance to the early return of urinary continence for patients postoperatively.

Menon and colleagues evaluated the continence rates in 1,100 patients who had a minimum of 1 year of follow-up after RALP.<sup>39</sup> Continence was defined as “no pads or a single pad for security purposes only and failure to leak urine on provocative maneuvers.” They reported a 93% continence rate at 12 months following lateral prostatic fascia-sparing RALP and 23.7% of these men reported having complete urinary control immediately at the time of catheter removal (0 pads). The median time to complete urinary control was 3 weeks (range, 0–120 weeks). When stratifying patients according to the year of surgery, they found that those patients operated on in 2001 and 2002 had a longer median time to continence (on average, 5 weeks), whereas no difference was demonstrated in those operated on in 2003–2005 (on average, <3 weeks). The authors concluded that the impact of experience and learning curve resulted in reproducibility of return to continence.

Tewari and coworkers recently reported continence rates for 182 patients treated with RALP and their technique of total reconstruction of the vesico-urethral junction.<sup>38</sup> Continence was defined as no pad usage or one small liner used for security purposes only. Postoperative continence rates of 38, 83, 91, and 97% were found at 1, 6, 12, and 24 weeks, respectively.

The continence rates in various RALP series are shown in Table 1.2.

### **Technical Refinements to Improve Early Postoperative Functional Outcomes**

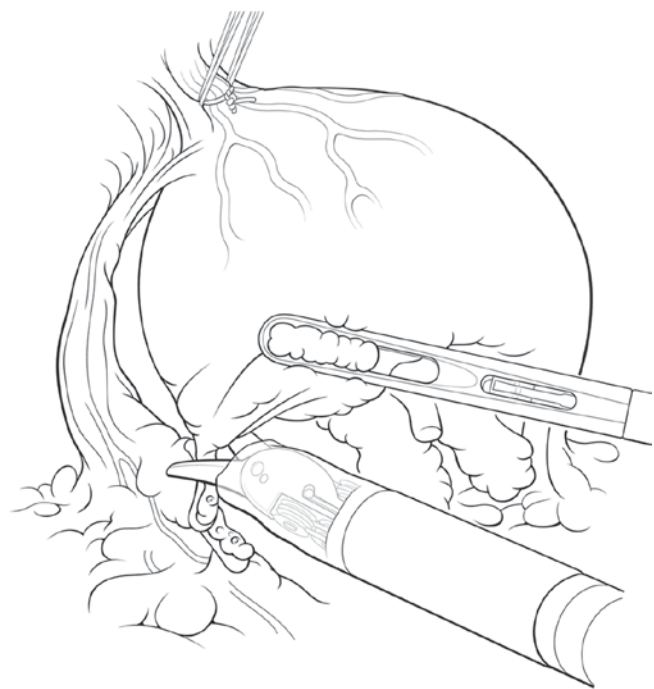
Our experience with RALP is now over 2,300 cases. Throughout this experience, we have continuously modified our technique in a quest to improve surgical outcomes. Here, we describe two of the refinements in our surgical technique, which we feel have had the greatest impact on the early functional outcomes following RALP.

#### **Athermal Early Retrograde Release of the Neurovascular Bundle**

Our approach to RALP is the traditional antegrade transperitoneal technique.<sup>26</sup> One significant refinement in our approach, however, has been to release the neurovascular bundles in a retrograde direction prior to control and division



**Fig. 1.2** Early retrograde release of the neurovascular bundle. The interfacial plane is developed between the neurovascular bundle laterally and the prostatic fascia medially. The bundle is stabilized with the PK dissector in the left hand, while the prostate is swept medially off the bundle with the monopolar scissors. Reprinted from Coughlin et al<sup>41</sup> with permission from Springer



**Fig. 1.3** Early retrograde release of the neurovascular bundle. The vascular pedicle is ligated with a hemolock clip. The clip is placed above the path of the neurovascular bundle. Releasing the bundle early and delineating its path avoids inadvertent damage to it at this point. Reprinted from Coughlin et al<sup>41</sup> with permission from Springer

of the prostatic pedicles. This technique is a hybrid of both the traditional open and laparoscopic approaches to nerve sparing. After dividing the bladder neck and completing the

posterior dissection, we incise the levator fascia along the length of the prostate. Using gentle blunt dissection, we develop the interfascial plane for nerve sparing and release the neurovascular bundle from the posterolateral surface of the prostate (Fig. 1.2). This approach allows us to clearly delineate the path of the neurovascular bundle prior to the placement of hemlock clips on the prostatic pedicles (Fig. 1.3). We are therefore able to avoid inadvertent injury to the cavernous nerves at this point of the dissection.

### Modified Posterior Reconstruction of the Rhabdosphincter

Temporary urinary incontinence after radical prostatectomy for prostate cancer remains a disadvantage of surgical treatment. Though long-term continence rates after radical prostatectomy are excellent, the time it takes to regain continence has a significant impact on the patient's quality of life in the initial postoperative period. Several technical modifications have been proposed to promote an earlier return of continence, including bladder-neck sparing, preservation of the puboprostatic ligaments, intussusception of the reconstructed bladder neck, and posterior reconstruction of the rhabdosphincter.<sup>38</sup>

Posterior reconstruction of the rhabdosphincter was initially described in 2001, by Rocco and colleagues, and consisted of a two-layered reconstruction with apposition of the free edge of Denovilliers' fascia and the posterior bladder with the posterior aspect of the rhabdosphincter and posterior median raphe.<sup>42</sup> The technique provides posterior support for the sphincteric mechanism and also draws the bladder caudally into a supported position, taking all tension of the vesicourethral anastomosis. The same authors reported significantly quicker times to recovery of urinary continence following open radical prostatectomy using this technique.<sup>43</sup>

The benefits of robotic technology are ideally suited for such precise suturing in the confines of the male pelvis. We adopted and modified this technique for use in RALP. The principles are consistent with the two-layer reconstruction originally described by Rocco with some minor technical modifications. The reconstruction is performed utilizing a continuous suture of two 3–0 monocryl sutures (RB1 needles) of different colors that are tied together with each individual length being 12 cm. The free edge of the remaining Denovilliers' fascia is identified following prostatectomy. This edge is approximated to the posterior aspect of the rhabdosphincter with a running suture using one arm of the continuous monocryl suture. Typically, four bites of Denovilliers' fascia and the rhabdosphincter/posterior median raphe are taken and the edges are approximated. The second layer of the reconstruction is then commenced with the other arm of the monocryl suture. This layer approximates the posterior

bladder (2 cm posterosuperior to the bladder neck) to the initial reconstructed layer of posterior rhabdosphincter and Denovilliers' fascia. A continuous modified Van Velthoven vesicourethral anastomosis<sup>44</sup> is then performed with a running suture.

Our initial pilot study using this technique revealed a complete "early continence" rate (no pads) of 58% at 1 week postoperatively. If the definition of continent is broadened to also include mild urinary incontinence (0 or 1 pad per day), the rate was 72%.<sup>45</sup> Other authors have also demonstrated improvements in early postoperative continence rates following LRP and RALP utilizing a similar reconstruction.<sup>46,47</sup>

### Conclusion

Since the first RALP was performed in 2000, the operation has undergone significant standardization and modification. The use of this operation has increased exponentially in the United States and a similar pattern is likely to be seen in other continents. Today, RALP offers men a minimally invasive approach to radical prostatectomy with good oncological and functional outcomes. Owing to refinements in technique, the majority of patients will experience a quick return to normal daily activities with minimal impact on their health-related quality of life.

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