



ROBOTIC SURGERY

Bladder Cancer

Cancer wasn't something James Wilkinson ever wanted to think about again.

Ten years ago, Mr. Wilkinson, an avid fisherman who grew up on the Jersey shore, was diagnosed with and treated for lung cancer. In the decade since, he had been completely cancer free. So when a bladder cancer diagnosis recently surfaced, the 78-year-old Toms River resident admitted he was worried.

"Cancer is a word you never want to hear," says Wilkinson. "It's a scary thing to be told you have cancer, but thankfully, this day and age with the expertise of the physicians and the new and advanced technology offered, the outlook seemed positive."

After his diagnosis, followed by local medical management, Mr. Wilkinson was referred to Robert Weiss, MD, Associate Professor of Surgery at The Cancer Institute of New Jersey and Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, and an attending urologist at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJ) for a consultation and more aggressive treatment.

At RWJ and The Cancer Institute of New Jersey, what Mr. Wilkinson found was a minimally invasive procedure - robotic cystectomy surgery featuring miniaturized instruments and 3-D cameras - to treat his invasive bladder cancer.

Dr. Weiss has been successfully performing robotic cystectomy (bladder) and robotic prostatectomy (prostate) surgery - both part

of the Minimally Invasive Surgery Program at RWJ - for more than four years. New Jersey ranks among the highest in the country for bladder cancer cases.

Only a handful of physicians nationally are performing robotic cystectomy surgery (namely in New York, North Carolina and New Jersey) and for patients who are candidates, the surgery "has completely revolutionized the treatment of bladder and prostate cancer," says Dr. Weiss. "The robot makes it easier to make smaller incisions and work with greater precision than traditional open surgery. But the robot doesn't go it alone," he notes. "The surgeon is still in control!"

When Dr. Weiss explained the procedure and treatment options, Mr. Wilkinson says he was "absolutely amazed. Rather than cutting into my abdomen and pelvis, Dr. Weiss and the robot, worked through three tiny 'holes.' It was unbelievable to me that something like this could even be done. There were no gashes or cuts, there was no scarring, and I was in the hospital only a short time."

The very small incisions translate to significantly less pain, less blood loss and shorter hospital stays. Recovery time is quicker and the long-term potential for better outcomes - including nerve and muscle preservation for sexual function and reduced incidence of incontinence.

Bladder cancer starts in the bladder (which holds and releases urine). While its exact cause is unknown, bladder cancer has been linked to cigarette smoking, exposure to chemicals in the workplace, and some chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Some research also links bladder cancer to the use of artificial sweeteners and chronic bladder infections. Treatment of bladder cancer is determined by both its type and stage of development.

According to Dr. Weiss, the robotic cystectomy is a minimally invasive bladder surgery for the treatment of invasive cancer.

"If [bladder or prostate] cancer is on the surface, it's like skin cancer and can be scraped off," says Dr. Weiss. "But if the cancer is invasive, the bladder (and sometimes prostate and lymph nodes) must be removed. The robot, which has 'wrists,' helps to remove the cancerous bladder with smaller incisions and less problematic post-surgical outcomes. The magnification offered by the robot facilitates better precision during the surgery, sparing vital delicate nerves and muscle tissue." Once a cancerous bladder is removed, patients - considering their age and medical condition - are either given an outside bag to collect the urine or new bladder built from the intestines.

Mr. Wilkinson reports feeling great and "knock on wood, I'm cancer-free. I saw



Shown: Robert Weiss, MD, Associate Professor of Surgery at The Cancer Institute of New Jersey and Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and an attending Urologist at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital.

Dr. Weiss a month ago and my tests, my health - everything looks good," he says. "I'm looking forward to next summer - and doing some fishing."

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