

Dear Dr. Strebel

On 26 May 2009, in an operation ranging over several hours, you have removed my prostate with a cancer tumour and 15 lymph knots in surrounding areas using the new Da Vinci S Surgical Robot of the Hospital of the Canton Graubünden in Chur. I would like to describe how I have experienced this operation and how I have prepared myself for it.

As a graduate engineer I am interested in the technology. Before the operation I have investigated in the internet the system, the manufacturer Intuitive Surgical Inc and experiences by other patients. I found patient testimonials shown on the manufacturer's website very helpful (see [www.intuitivesurgical.com](http://www.intuitivesurgical.com)). I recommend internet research to all patients. You can watch a TV show demonstrating the system's precision in a test set-up. Instructed by a surgeon a TV host learns how to work with the robot's arms using the system's monitor with its 15 times zoom capabilities. After only minutes of practising she was able to perform complicated tasks. Also, you can watch entire operations recorded through the 3D camera inserted in the patient's abdomen.

First I would like to address critical comments you sometimes hear about the use of robot technology in operations. Some critics claim that conventional operations are better and safer. Using a robot, they feel, the surgeon is too far removed from the patient. As a result, he cannot depend on his natural senses and intuition. This is not the case at all. We are all confronted daily with indirect hand-eye coordination and sensitivity. Just think of driving a car or flying an airplane. Without indirect sensitivity a pilot could not fly an airplane. Our brain and senses are so well developed they can learn quickly to react to indirect input. Just look at kids today playing with computer games. It is impossible to play them successfully without feeling and quick reactions. This is also true for the Da Vinci S Surgical System in the hands of an experienced robot surgeon. The tool is only as good as the person using it, but the Da Vinci S Surgical System is the worldwide leader in this technology.

After researching the system and finding out that you, Dr. Strebel, are one of the most experienced robot surgeons in Switzerland I was very confident and calm.

What were my first impressions after the operation? When I came around in the weak-up station on 26 May around 3 pm I felt ok without any pain or discomfort. I do not know how much this impression was supported by pain killers. I was back in my room three hours after the operation at 5 pm when I answered phone calls from my family. As I heard later my statements were not precise, and I fell asleep soon. I woke up around midnight. My post-anaesthetic intoxication was gone. The night nurse came and wanted to give me pain killers, but I declined as I felt good. I started my laptop, but soon I felt tired and went back to sleep. In the morning I felt good again, without pain and without pain killers. I recuperated quickly, and the time spans before I tired grew considerably longer.

My pains never exceeded the pains associated with very sore muscles as you may experience after skiing intensively without fitness training. The prostatectomy and the removal of lymph knots is not extremely painful per se, but incisions through abdominal muscles become more painful the longer such incisions are. The incisions for the arms, tools and camera of the Da Vinci S Surgical System are short, and the patient's blood loss is much lower than in a normal operation. As a result, the recuperation period is much shorter.

Another advantage is that the Da Vinci Surgical System has the capability to treat certain body parts with extreme care. I felt this effect when the catheter was removed. The closing muscle of my urethra went straight back to functioning normally, and my bladder emptied itself completely. I could hardly tell the difference from passing water before my operation. For me this is an important advantage of the Da Vinci Surgical System.

I would like to thank the nurses of the Chur Hospital's Urology Department for their professional and friendly care. I have lived several years in Hong Kong and know the proverbial good care of their private hospitals. The Chur Hospital's Urology Department meets the same standards. The only negative experience in this hospital was the antiquated internet access for patients through the telephone. Most of the time it did not work at all.

I would like to recommend an operation with the Da Vinci Surgical System to any patient for whom it is an option. Ask your doctor to give you the relevant statistical data, which support its success.

I thank you, Dr. Strebel, for this effective operation, and I wish you more success and all the best in the future. I composed this email for the benefit of other patients. You can use it as you deem appropriate. If you wish to publish it, please do so on an anonymous basis.

Sincerely yours