



Achieving better outcomes with expertise and technology

Advanced techniques like Robotic surgery can enhance precision and help the doctor with difficult laparoscopic surgeries.



Featuring
Dr Chin Chong Min
Urologist
@ Mount Elizabeth
Novena Hospital

The pursuit of good health is something that most people would go to great lengths for, and that is something that was clear for Mr Terrence Patrick Swift. The American citizen travelled from Beijing, where he is based, to Singapore in search of the best treatment for his kidney cancer.

AN UNEXPECTED DIAGNOSIS

Mr Swift's journey began in Bangkok, Thailand, where he was holidaying in November 2015. The 54-year-old, who lectures at a university in Beijing, went through a health screening at a Bangkok hospital - showed a 5 cm mass on his kidney. Upon his return to China, an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan confirmed it to be cancerous. The only good news was that the cancer was still at stage 1, which meant that he could still be cured through surgery.

Keyhole surgery, also known as minimally invasive surgery, was Mr Swift's preferred type of treatment. He had heard that it was safer, with less blood loss and risk of complications compared to open surgery, less painful and gave faster recovery. His initial choice was to undergo treatment in Beijing but the hospital there had limited experience, having only started their robotic surgery programme a year ago.

FINDING THE RIGHT DOCTOR

While looking for other options, his surgeon friend suggested that Mr Swift try Singapore for its reputation as a premium healthcare hub. Mr Swift undertook some research and found Dr Chin Chong Min, urology surgeon with 22 years of experience who is based at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital which has the da Vinci robot. Dr Chin is renowned for his surgical expertise in treating urinary and kidney cancers using robotic surgery, having trained in the technique since 2005. This inspired confidence in Mr Swift, who took the first step to contact Dr Chin.

"When I first reached out to Dr Chin, it was through email. I sent him copies of all my scans and medical reports. What first struck me was how communicative and



Dr Chin with Mr Swift after surgery

patient Dr Chin was. He explained my condition and all the treatment options available, as well as all the possible consequences. In fact, he even went the extra mile to communicate with my surgeon friend to explain all the medical terminology relevant to robotic kidney surgery so that my friend could help explain the situation to me," Mr Swift said.

Scheduling an operation took some time, as Mr Swift's medical insurance coverage needed to be arranged and the cost estimate approved. Eventually, Mr Swift arrived in Singapore in January 2016, and had the operation the next day.

PARTIAL NEPHRECTOMY WITH ROBOTIC SURGERY

Some doctors that Mr Swift spoke to recommended removing the whole kidney as his kidney cancer was more than 4 cm in size but Dr Chin was confident that he could do a partial nephrectomy using the da Vinci robot so that most of the kidney is spared. "It would not be possible to do partial nephrectomy for a tumour this size using standard laparoscopy because of the inherent limitations of the rigid instruments. Also, the kidney can only tolerate 30 mins of blood supply interruption and time is of essence in this surgery. So the usual options will either be open surgery with an incision at least

20 cm long given his large frame, or laparoscopic total nephrectomy if the robot was not available." said Dr Chin.

"There were some challenges in the operation due to Mr Swift's body size, tumour size and its unusual location in his kidney," Dr Chin explained. "It took 3 hours and 45 minutes, but thanks to the robotic technology, the cancer could be excised with clear margins and blood loss of less than 300 ml with no blood transfusion needed."

The surgery was successful, and the pathology report confirmed that the cancer was removed completely with adequate clear margin. "The whole process, including recovery, was smoother than I expected," Mr Swift said. "I was able to stand on the second day and walk around by the fourth day. The hospital is also very impressive, the rooms resemble hotel rooms, and the nurses here have taken very good care of me."

"I am very happy that I was able to cure Mr Swift's cancer completely," Dr Chin said. "I still keep in touch with him to track his progress, and he recovered so fast that he was able to get back to the gym the following week to lose the 3 kg he had gained from the binge eating as a result of depression from knowing he had cancer."