



Traveling exhibit introduces leading edge lung biopsy robot to region

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Athens, Ga. – Lung cancer is the most deadly cancer on earth. As part of its commitment to elevating the fight against the deadly disease, St. Mary's Hospital is hosting a visit from Intuitive Surgical's Thoracic Oncology Mobile Experience (TOME) on Monday, March 3, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the hospital's Athens campus. The public is invited.

Intuitive is one of the world's leading producers of robotic surgical technology. The 1,000-square-foot travelling TOME truck gives visitors an opportunity to learn about and even test-drive two of Intuitive's most advanced surgical robots. TOME features the Ion endoluminal system, which can obtain biopsy samples from potential lung cancers, and the da Vinci robotic surgical system, which can be used to remove diseased portions of the lungs. Both robots are operated by skilled, highly trained surgeons and use minimally invasive techniques that reduce pain, scarring and recovery times.

TOME tours will be led by Intuitive staff and will be open to the general public, school groups, ancillary healthcare workers, physicians and other providers at no charge. The truck will be located in the hospital's H parking lot, accessible from St. Mary's Broad Street and Alps Road entrances.

St. Mary's is the first hospital in the Athens area to offer the Ion system for lung cancer detection, and introduced da Vinci technology to the region in 2010, with multiple upgrades as robotic technology has advanced.

"Bringing the Ion robotic bronchoscopy system to Athens aligns with our vision to improve the health of our communities and each person we serve," said Stonish Pierce, president and CEO, Trinity Health Georgia. "We are proud to add the Ion to our fleet of leading-edge surgical robots to provide our community with the most advanced medical technology available."



Intuitive Surgical's TOME truck (photo by Intuitive)



The Ion endoluminal system (photo by Intuitive)

“Lung cancer is the deadliest form of cancer in Georgia, America and the world,” said Dr. Eduardo Martinez with Athens Pulmonology and Sleep Medicine. “The Ion enables us to diagnose lung cancers much sooner than traditional biopsies, which means many patients can begin treatment earlier, when it’s most likely to be effective.”

With traditional methods, patients must wait weeks from when a suspicious lesion is found to when cancer is confirmed. Only then can treatment begin. But delays as short as 6 weeks can worsen patient outcomes by 13 percent, according to a study published in the *Annals of Thoracic Surgery* in 2015. Using the Ion can shave weeks off the process. When caught early, the 5-year survival rate for lung cancer is up to 92 percent. But today, with most cancers detected much later, the 5-year survival rate is only 26 percent.

“Creating a faster, simpler process from screening to treatment has tremendous potential to save lives and improve outcomes,” said Dr. Chris Malone, thoracic surgeon. “That’s why St. Mary’s has acquired the Ion and also has Intuitive’s da Vinci Si surgical robot, which is a highly accurate system we can use to remove cancerous nodules with minimal damage to surrounding tissues.”

The Ion uses ultra-thin, ultra-maneuverable tubes called catheters to collect samples from anywhere in the lungs, including peripheral areas where more than 70 percent of lung cancer nodules occur. The surgeon does not need to create an incision; instead, the Ion uses the mouth and windpipe to access the lungs from the inside. The procedure is performed under general anesthesia, and nearly all patients go home the same day.

Early detection is a key step in getting patients the care they need. St. Mary’s offers low-dose CT screening by referral from physicians. In addition, patients at high risk can schedule a lung cancer screening themselves at any of St. Mary’s imaging centers in Athens, Oconee County, Lavonia, or Greensboro. Anyone age 50-77 with a history of heavy smoking is eligible. Call 706-389-2700 for information or to schedule a screening.

About Intuitive Surgical, Inc.

Intuitive (Nasdaq: ISRG), headquartered in Sunnyvale, Calif., is a global technology leader in minimally invasive care and a pioneer of robotic-assisted surgery. At Intuitive, our mission statement is we believe that minimally invasive care is life-enhancing care. Through ingenuity and intelligent technology, we expand the potential of physicians to heal without constraints. Intuitive brings more than two decades of leadership in robotic-assisted surgical technology and solutions to its offerings, and develops, manufactures and markets the da Vinci surgical system and the Ion endoluminal system.

Additional images (photo credit: Intuitive Surgical Inc):

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