



Doctors Using Robots to Help Patients

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BAY AREA (KRON) -- Modern medicine is becoming increasingly high-tech with doctors using technology to deliver top quality care.

Now surgeons at U.C. Davis Medical Center are taking that idea to the next level, using robots to take care of patients after surgery. You could call it technology with a very human face.

Rudy the robot is the latest member of staff at U.C Davis. The 5-foot 5-inch, 200-pound machine looks like a giant floor polisher, with a computer screen mounted on top.



We met Rudy as it did rounds, visiting patients recovering from surgery. A mile or so away Doctor Michael Nguyen was sitting at his computer, guiding Rudy around the hospital.

Dr. Nguyen says Rudy is more than just a fun gadget, "Rudy would be a tool that doctors can use to kind of extend their ability to see patients. So, for example, if a doctor is working at multiple hospitals they would be able to use Rudy to round on patients at hospitals where they are not able to get to."

The robot is part of an experiment to see if this kind of technology can help in taking care of patients after surgery. There are already studies that show patients prefer to see their own doctors after surgery, rather than a doctor they don't know, even if that visit is only via Rudy. Now physicians want to see if it reduces patient stay in the hospital, improves outcomes and reduces costs.

A video game joystick controls movement. Strategically placed cameras and microphones allow the doctor to see and talk to patients, and patients to see and talk back to the doctor.

Rudy's camera can also zoom in on details, for instance to check a patient's flow chart or to look at an incision.

Patients like Anita Zanartu say it's a surprise at first but one you quickly get used to. "I was shocked. It's pretty neat though. He's right there, he answers all your questions," she says.

Rudy is popular with patient's visitors too. They smile as it passes them in the corridor. Even pose for photographs with it.

Doctor Nguyen says Rudy won't take the place of a human. But it could give highly skilled surgeons another tool to make sure their patients are doing okay, even if they can't be there to see them in person.

Dr. Nguyen says, "It's the best technology in the sense that eventually people just ignore the technology and use it for what it's for, which is to allow you to interact with a patient at a distance."

Dr. Nguyen says Rudy could have many possible uses. For example a physician who is out of the country could still check-up on a patient in the hospital. Or a surgeon who works in several rural hospitals could keep tabs on all his patients without having to spend hours on the road. It could even be used to check up on highly infectious patients, without exposing the surgeon to the patient.