



Latest News

Robot Doctors May Soon Make "Telerounds" at Hospitals



Robots are now widely used in industry, but you don't expect to encounter them in a hospital hallway. These days, however, you just might at the U.C. Davis Medical Center.

A robot equipped with a screen, microphone and speakers allow the physician to converse with patients as if they were in the same room. The robot, nicknamed "Rudy," is mobile and can be remotely steered down hospital hallways and in and out of patient rooms. The device allows a doctor many miles away to do "rounds" at the hospital.

Some doctors see "telerounding" as a 21st Century means of visiting patients who are far away. "If you're in a rural hospital that doesn't have a cardiologist or some specialist available to be seen immediately, instead of having to wait 'til the next day, you can have a doctor evaluate the patients in the middle of the night," said Dr. Mike Nguyen.

Rudy and three similar robots are the centerpiece of a study being conducted at four separate hospitals. The aim of the project is to show that robotic medicine can be as safe as making traditional rounds.

After a period of adjustment, most patients respond well to the robot. "He answered all my questions just like he was here," said patient Carl Martin, who was visited by his doctor via Rudy.

The study should be complete by October or November.

Story last updated Friday, August 20, 2004 - 12:55 AM