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The Surgeon Speaks-Benny Weksler, MD, MBA

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Dr. Benny Weksler, who is Board Certified in Surgery and Thoracic Surgery, is a leader in the innovative technique of robotic surgery. “Like laparoscopic surgery,” Dr. Weksler explains, “robotic surgery is done via only a few small incisions. However, instead of holding the surgical instruments, the surgeon sits at a control panel and utilizes robotic arms to move the instruments.” He notes that robotic surgery is far safer because it offers greater precision, smaller incisions, decreased blood loss, and less pain for the patient.

The only robotic system approved by the Food and Drug Administration is the da Vinci® Surgical System, named after the famous artist who invented the first robot. “We are the only facility in Philadelphia using robotic surgery for thoracic operations,” says Dr. Weksler. In 2008, Jefferson performed seven operations utilizing this exciting new technology. That number will increase in 2009 and already includes four robotassisted esophagectomies for patients like Florence Jackson.

Benny Weksler, MD, MBA Director, Minimally Invasive and Robotic Thoracic Surgery Program

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When Florence Jackson, 73, had some difficulty swallowing one evening, her husband insisted she see her doctor. She mentioned it at her six-month check-up and the doctor said it was possible that her chest pain could be due to cancer. A barium swallow test revealed an obstruction in her esophagus. She mentioned it at her six-month check-up and her husband insisted she see her doctor. Then, at Jefferson, she underwent a laparoscopic esophagectomy, which is an innovative, minimally invasive surgery with a relatively short recovery.

Jefferson is also the only hospital in the Philadelphia region performing a high volume of laparoscopic esophagectomies—23 during 2009, and the Department aspects to discuss that number in 2009. A study of these cases demonstrated a decrease in morbidity over open surgeries. Dr. Rosato explains the benefits of this procedure: "With conventional ‘open’ surgeries, the incisions are large and painful, and the hospital stay is longer." He says a laparoscopic esophagectomy results in shorter hospitalization and patient recovery.

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