



HEALTH CARE & BIOTECH

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Robot Surgery Debuts in Van Nuys

First outpatient replacement could lead to lower costs.

By **AMY STULICK** Staff Reporter

Valley surgeon Dr. **Jaime Hernandez** performed the first outpatient knee replacement surgery earlier this month using the CORI robot, according to a statement from the **Center for Orthopedic Surgery** in Van Nuys.

Unveiled by U.K.-based medical device company **Smith & Nephew** just several weeks before the surgery took place on Sept. 3, the robot allows a surgeon more precision while operating, the orthopedic center said.

That translates to a reduced cost overall because there's usually no overnight stay, and the surgery itself is done in less time, Hernandez said — the more accurate bone cuts are during an operation, the less a surgeon will have to deal with soft tissue damage and bleeding.

Preoperative planning with the CORI doesn't require CT scans or MRIs either, instead using 3D digital modeling to better understand each patient's "unique knee anatomy," the center added in its statement.

"(It's) another great leap in the technological advancement of knee replacement for patients around the country," Dr. **Paul Simic**, managing director at the **Southern California Orthopedic Institute** in Van Nuys, said in a statement. "We are committed to innovation to offer our patients and orthopedic patients everywhere the very best, and together, we want to congratulate Dr. Hernandez on his achievement and continued dedication to his patients and our field of medicine."

More people will be able to get this type of surgery in an outpatient setting, Hernandez



Thumbs Up: Dr. Jaime Hernandez, center, with team in Van Nuys.

told the Business Journal, another cost saving and secure measure welcome to many patients during the pandemic.

"What I tell my patients is you're not going to get a hospital-acquired infection if you don't go to the hospital," he added, referencing not only COVID-19, but other infections people tend to pick up at a hospital.

"The way that I see it, not only is it safe to do it in the surgery center, but the technology allows it to be better than most hospitals, so that's kind of big news, combining the two, the robot plus the surgery center," continued Hernandez.

Medicare approved coverage for such surgeries last year, but the change took effect this year, Hernandez said.

"There has been a trend to go more for outpatient (procedures). Personally, I've been

doing outpatient knee and hip replacements for about six years now," he added. "The idea was and is to provide a safe alternative to the hospital for patients who don't need the hospital, so usually younger, healthier patients compared to elderly people."

Currently, a third of his patients can have their surgeries at the orthopedic surgery center. Hernandez expects that number to bump up to half or at the most two-thirds that can opt for an outpatient joint replacement because of the Medicare policy change.

Hernandez takes patients at the orthopedic center's Valencia office too, but Van Nuys is the only location for CORI-assisted surgeries.

"Joint replacement kind of leads the way in this conversation; this will be applied to other surgeries in other fields, like heart surgery," said Hernandez.

Hospital to Get Out of Obstetrics

West Hills cites 'significant decline' in number of births.

By **AMY STULICK** Staff Reporter

West Hills Hospital will close its obstetrics program effective Nov. 1, the health care organization announced earlier this month.

The hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit; Mother/Baby; Labor and Delivery; and Nursery sections will be removed, with 35 beds and 55 staff members impacted.

Administration will work with program staff to offer career development training options within the hospital system, and are currently working on deciding how to repurpose the space.

Management reached the decision to close these facilities after observing a "significant decline" in the number of babies born at the hospital over several years, the hospital said in a statement.

Year to date, the hospital is down almost 20 percent with about 35 deliveries each month, a representative with West Hills said in an email to the Business Journal — 893 babies were delivered in 2015, compared to 511 last year.

"At the same time, the hospital is experiencing greater demand for other medical and surgical needs in other areas like cardiology, neurosciences and orthopedics," West Hills Hospital said in a statement. "By making this change, we will be better able to devote resources to other services that are now in greater demand."

The hospital "will work closely with the obstetrical medical staff to maintain continuity of care for its patients. We will also continue to provide emergency care services, including OB/GYN, to all patients," West Hills said.

Closest facilities to offer comparable services include **Northridge Hospital**, **Providence Tarzana**, and **Valley Presbyterian** in Van Nuys.

West Hills Hospital is owned by **HCA Healthcare** in Nashville, Tenn.

Amgen, Lilly Join For COVID-19

Plan to collaborate on manufacturing treatments.

By **AMY STULICK** Staff Reporter

Biopharma giants **Amgen Inc.** and **Eli Lilly** earlier this month announced an antibody manufacturing collaboration for potential COVID-19 treatments, in an effort to scale up production for multiple treatments still in development.

The collaboration between Thousand Oaks-based Amgen and Lilly, headquartered in Indianapolis, will significantly boost global supply capacity for Lilly's COVID treatments, the companies said.

Among those in development is LY-CoV-555, Lilly's leading antibody treatment from another collaboration with Vancouver-based **AbCellera**. The virus-neutralizing antibody treatment entered Phase 3 clinical trials to combat the virus at nursing homes, according to an Aug. 3 statement from Lilly. The same treatment is in Phase 2 trials for COVID patients with mild-to-moderate symptoms.

Another Lilly antibody treatment, LY-CoV016, is in Phase 1 trials and the result of yet another collaboration, this time with China's **Junshi Biosciences**. The final notable Lilly antibody treatment focuses on treating COVID patients with acute respiratory distress syndrome, currently in Phase 2 clinical trials.

"The level of cooperation among pharma companies in response to the pandemic is un-



Coronavirus Collaborator: Headquarters building on Amgen campus in Thousand Oaks.

precedented," remarked Dr. **Laura Esserman**, co-founder of **Quantum Leap Healthcare Collaborative**, a Bay Area nonprofit focused on matching clinical trials and sponsorship. Esserman made the comment in connection to yet another collaboration with multiple biopharma companies, including Amgen, to test its psoriasis drug Otezla on COVID patients experiencing respiratory problems.

Should regulatory agencies around the world approve one or more of Lilly's therapies, exponentially increasing manufacturing capacity is a crucial next step, Dr. **Daniel Skoronsky**, chief scientific officer at Lilly,

said in a statement.

"We are impressed with Lilly's data, in particular the reduction in hospitalizations, and are enthusiastic about the potential for these neutralizing antibodies as a therapeutic for COVID-19," Dr. **David Reese**, vice president of research and development at Amgen, said in a statement.

"This is yet another example of the ways our industry is closely collaborating to combat this devastating disease and help patients around the world access new therapies," said **Esteban Santos**, Amgen's vice president of operations.



West Hills: Waiting room in hospital, above, and exterior of HCA facility where births have dropped almost 20 percent so far this year.