

More precision, less pain with robotic surgery

New machine capable of complex procedures

BUYEKEZWA MAKWABE

SOUTH Africans are to benefit from a revolutionary robotic system capable of performing complex surgical procedures on humans.

Patients with prostate problems will be the first in the country to go under the robotic knife in October, when the Da Vinci surgery robotic system goes live at the Pretoria Urology Hospital.

The sophisticated robot, which resembles an octopus

and is operated by remote controls by surgeons, costs between R15.5-million and R17.5-million.

It offers surgeons enhanced dexterity and greater precision while operating, and patients benefit from quicker recovery times and less pain.

"In the case of a prostatectomy [removal of the prostate gland], the area where the gland is has lots of nerves that have to be protected and lots of precision is needed," said the hospital's CEO, Sarel van der Walt.

The urology hospital, which already uses highly specialised technology, is sending urologists to Belgium this month for "intensive training" on how to use the machine.

"When they come back, they

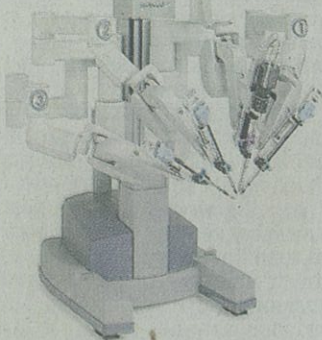
This way, there is even more accuracy than there was before

will bring a doctor who will help with the first few surgeries. We cannot experiment on patients," said Van der Walt. "It will be exciting to see a machine holding the instruments and not the human hand."

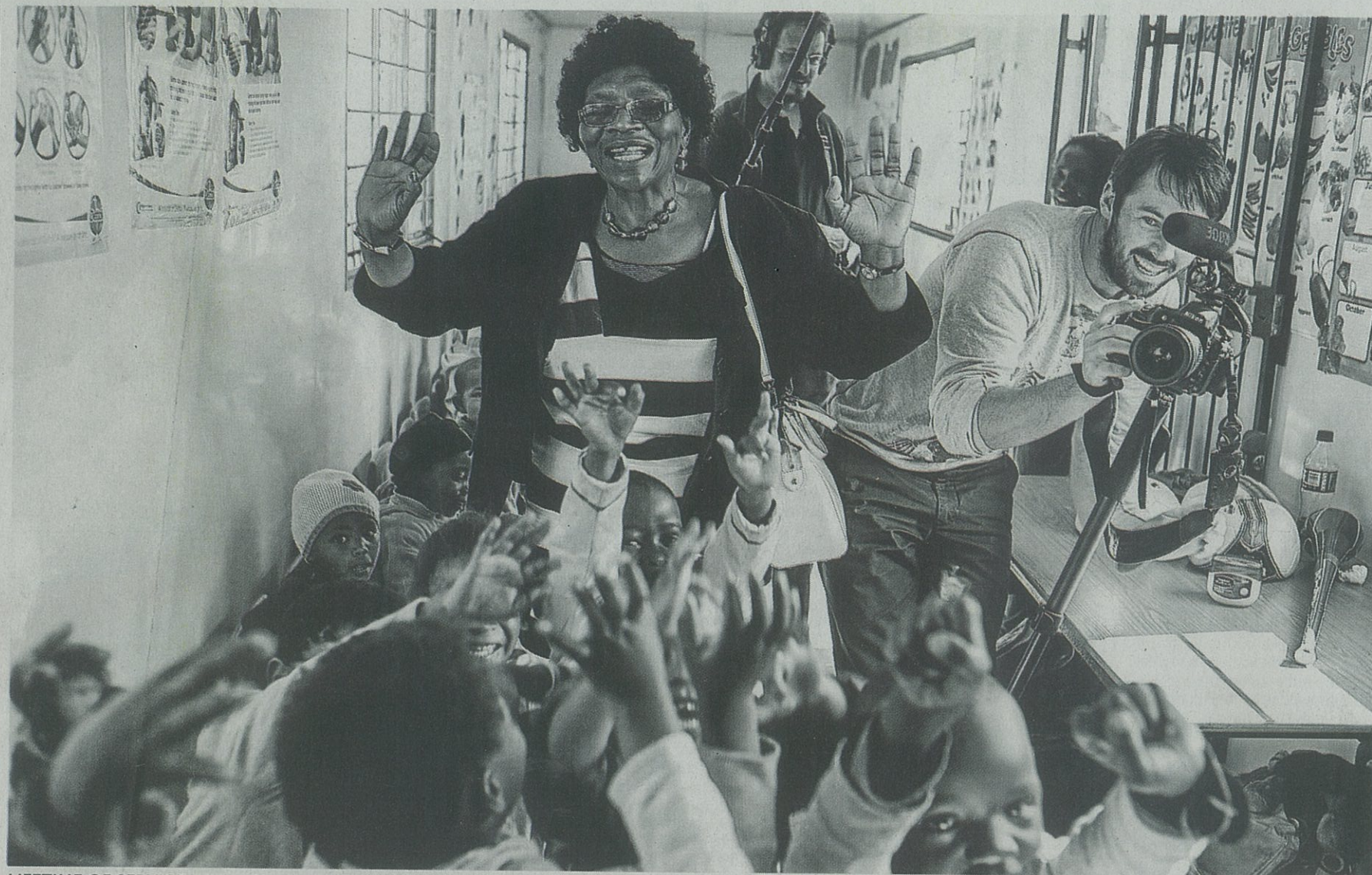
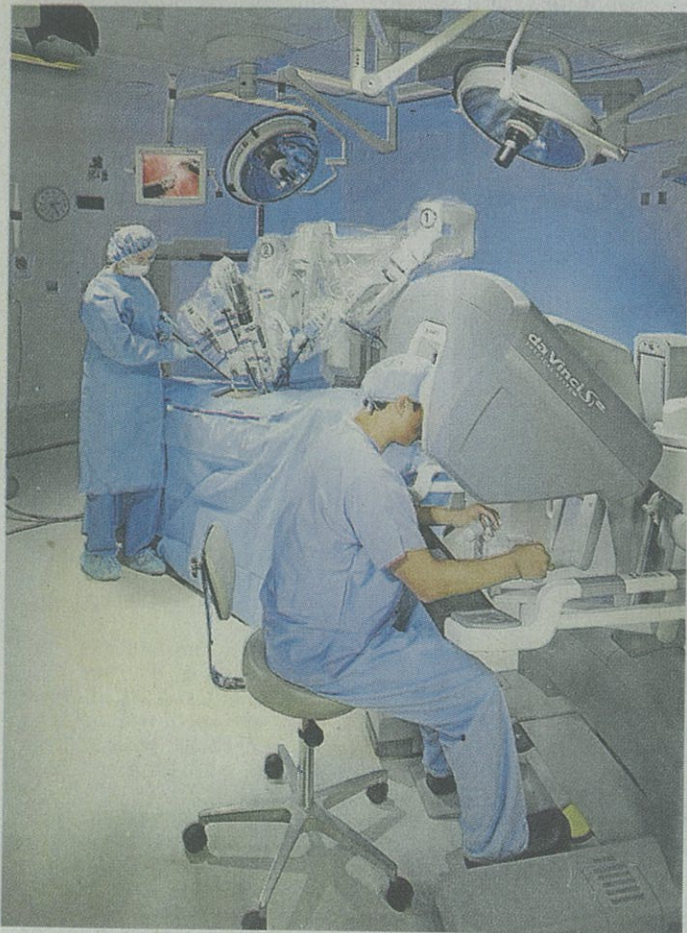
Explaining how the machine works, he said: "The doctor is there next to the patient, but this way there is more accuracy than before [because the robot's movements are more precise than the human hand can be]."

The machine, a first for South Africa, can also be used for gynaecological procedures and is popular in Europe and the US.

Thomas Dunbar, who heads Earth Medical — part of the Litha Group, which supplies medical equipment to hospitals — said the robot technology would take minimally invasive surgery to the next level.



ENHANCED DEXTERITY: The Da Vinci system can hold several instruments at the same time



LIFETIME OF SERVICE: Lillian Cingo being filmed at Noah's Ark community centre in Soweto during Adrian Steirn's photoshoot for the 21 Icons project

THEKISO ANTHONY LEFIFI

AT THE age of 75, neurosurgical nurse and counselling psychologist Lillian Cingo thinks sleep is a luxury.

She gasped in shock at the idea of resting in her old age.

"There shall be no slumber in South Africa," she said. "My God, how can you sleep?"

Cingo, who has 45 years' working experience, 22 of them in psychology, said South Africa could rest on its laurels only when every citizen had better health, education and housing.

She is one of the icons featured in photographer Adrian Steirn's 21 Icons project to celebrate inspiring South Africans.

Cingo has asked Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi to give her a call if he needs help.

She praised him for trying to bring experienced nurses out of retirement to help younger professionals with things that they could not learn from textbooks.

"To him I would like to say: 'You are doing a fantastic job. If at any time you need some help,

Nursing legend has no time for shut-eye

we are there for you.'

"He is a fantastic young man that has done so many improvements already.

"There are things that need to be improved, and they can only get better. He can't do it alone. We are with him," she said.

Cingo started her career at Baragwanath Hospital in the 1960s when a neurosurgeon

spotted her skills and encouraged her to go to the UK for further training because, as a black woman, she would not get that education locally.

In a decade she was twice nominated as Nurse of the Year in London, and in 1975 she was presented to Queen Elizabeth as the best neurosurgical nurse.

She was invited to start a

regional neurosurgical unit at the Royal Free Hospital in London, which she managed for the next 15 years.

She returned to South Africa only in 1995 after an invitation to help manage Transnet's Phelophepa (good, clean health) train, which travelled to remote corners of South Africa to bring healthcare to rural people. There are now two trains. Although she is no longer involved in the project, she has called for Phelophepa rough-terrain vehicles to drive to rural areas that the trains cannot reach.

She is concerned about South Africa's mental health. "We need to heal holistically," she said. She wants nurses to learn psychology because healing is important for more than just the body.

Steirn photographed her at Noah's Ark in Kliptown, Soweto, using a simple black backdrop.

"I wanted to take a portrait of

Lillian that reflected her life of service, that spoke about nursing and how incredible it is what people like her do," Steirn said.

The portrait shows Cingo in an old-fashioned nurse's uniform and speaks of a strong woman who has always honoured her profession through her actions and deeds.

Steirn said the portrait conveyed the strength required to take on difficult situations.

The original, signed portrait will be auctioned at the end of the series and the proceeds donated to the Phelophepa I and II trains.

SABC3 will flight a behind-the-scenes film of the photo shoot at 6.57 tonight. In it, Cingo tells Steirn of her passion for securing the health of especially the poverty-stricken inhabitants of rural areas.

● Cingo's portrait is published in the R16 South African edition of the Sunday Times today.

Meet the icons online

WE apologise to readers who have been missing out on the stories we have published on the inspiring people featured in the 21 Icons project.

Last week we featured Kumi Naidoo, an activist for environmental and social justice. The previous week, we featured Sophia

Williams-de Bruyn, one of the leaders of the Women's March to Pretoria in 1956.

Other icons covered so far are Nelson Mandela, FW de Klerk and Desmond Tutu. Read their stories and watch short videos on the making of their portraits at www.timeslive.co.za/lifestyle/2013/08/08/21icons