Robot makes theatre debut

● Arcot K Venkatasubramaniam, a consultant colorectal surgeon, Christian Phillips, a consultant gynaecologist with the Kymerax robot arm, and consultant urological surgeon Richard Hindley
Pic by Richard Garfield

SURGEONS at Basingstoke hospital will tomorrow be the first in the UK to use a new hand-held robot for reconstructive surgery in the pelvis.

The hospital, in Aldermaston Road, has been chosen to try out the equipment, which to the untrained eye looks like a humble drill.

Tomorrow, it will be used on a patient with gynaecological prolapse and bowel dysfunction.

The revolutionary advance in robotic technology, called Kymerax and developed by Terumo, is set to improve surgery across the country.

At just £300 or £400 per device, its price is just a fraction of the £1.8million cost of the surgery robots it may well replace.

Surgeons believe it will be faster and more precise, and it has the big advantage of being portable.

It provides more flexibility than a human wrist, allowing more precise stitching and better recovery for the patient.

By Emily Roberts

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The tip of the instrument moves in multiple directions to operate in areas that are difficult to reach.

Robots currently in use in UK hospitals are large, immobile and expensive, with high running costs every time they are used.

Christian Phillips, a consultant gynaecologist, and Arcot K Venkatasubramaniam, a consultant colorectal surgeon, will carry out the operation tomorrow.

Mr Phillips said: "Our team is very excited about this latest technology and it's an honour to be the first in the UK to carry out reconstructive surgery on the pelvic floor using this device."

He said surgeons using the robot still had the feel and touch of conventional surgery.

He added: "This robot can do things not physically possible with a human wrist and gives you the best of both worlds."

The Basingstoke-based Pelican Cancer Foundation will help to evaluate the new device.

Sarah Crane, chief executive of the foundation which aims to improve education and treatment of bowel, liver, prostate and bladder cancers, said: "This device is an exciting development in precision surgery."