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## Detroit Medical Center shows off robots

ADRIENNE SCHWISOW  
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**DETROIT** - The Detroit Medical Center is showing off a group of ten robots built for virtual medicine, calling the fleet of mechanical diagnostic aides and record keepers the largest in the country.

The 5-foot-5-inch tall RP-6 robots began arriving in February, and the medical center hopes to have at least one of the Internet-dependent creatures in each of six hospitals by May.

"This is the largest deployment of systems we've had, and that's going to allow us to watch and study how it's working and then take the concept to the next step," said Yulun Wang, the robot's creator and CEO of InTouch Health Inc., in Santa Barbara, Calif., which makes the devices.

The robots have 15-inch computer screens for heads and bodies made of steel and cast aluminum. They motor at a maximum speed of 2 mph in any direction. Doctors drive them with joysticks and batteries stay charged for up to eight hours.

They allow doctors to communicate directly with patients, nurses and other doctors from a distance, helping them diagnose, assess or hold conferences from outside the unit.

The robots already are in hospitals at Johns Hopkins University, Hackensack University in New Jersey and the universities of California at Los Angeles and Davis. Oakwood Hospital and Medical Center in Dearborn has two similar models.

At \$120,000 apiece or a rental price of \$4,000 a month, the RP-6 relies on broadband and wireless Internet capabilities to transmit images and sound. Because doctors tend to use them on rounds to check up on patients, Hackensack has dubbed theirs "Dr. Rounder."

"What's new is that it's only become in the past few years that the telecommunications infrastructure can support the bandwidth that we need," Wang said.

Dr. Joseph Bander, an intensive care physician and vice president of medical affairs at Harper University Hospital, part of the Detroit Medical Center, demonstrated one of the robots Wednesday. He sat in his office in front of an elongated computer screen and watched as a nurse five floors away in the neuroscience ICU changed the dressing on a patient suffering from a head bleed.

In the patient's room, Bander's face appeared large on the screen and he probed the nurse about the exact color of the discharge on the bandage she held up to the camera on the robot's head.

In another room, Bander used his joystick to park the robot at the end of a patient's bed. By zooming in on the machines at the head of the bed and on the patient's body, he could read vital signs, inspect intravenous sites and even look up the patient's nostrils.

"I was a skeptic, because I'm a very hands-on person," Bander said. "But I have access to so much information, including labs and x-rays, that I'm becoming more and more comfortable."

The technology is convenient for doctors. It can help them assess if they need to see a patient in person, trim waiting time for patients and give residents extra supervision while they work with patients.

At some point, Bander said, he could imagine becoming so familiar with the technology that he might use it even to help discharge patients.

The medical center has leased ten robots at a discounted rate of \$3,500 a month and spent \$9,000 to set up 19 workstations from which doctors can control the machines. About six doctors at Harper have expressed interest in learning the technology, including neurosurgeons, surgeons and dermatologists.

Oakwood, which has had its two machines - dubbed "Rosie the Robot" - for a year, is assessing the project and in the process of determining whether to get more, spokesman Tom Worobec said.

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On the Internet:

Detroit Medical Center: [www.dmc.org](http://www.dmc.org)

InTouch Health: [www.intouch-health.com](http://www.intouch-health.com)