

## Tapping into JGH expertise in gynecologic oncology

China has come calling on Dr. Walter Gotlieb. So has India. And Israel. Like many countries, they're feeling a growing need to enhance their expertise in gynecologic oncology and, more specifically, in fighting these cancers with the aid of robotic surgery. And so, they eagerly turn to Dr. Gotlieb, an acknowledged expert and Director of Gynecologic Oncology in the Segal Cancer Centre at the JGH.

For the JGH to take its place in the spotlight is a considerable achievement, since a mere four years have passed since the hospital first began performing robot-assisted surgery. Yet, in June of this year, Dr. Gotlieb, who is Professor of Obstetrics-Gynecology and Oncology at McGill University, was already paying his second visit to conduct a demonstration in China—the first being in May 2010 to perform China's first hysterectomy with a surgical robot in Beijing.

On Dr. Gotlieb's trip to New Delhi in April 2011 to conduct India's first robot-assisted radical hysterectomy, the demonstration was supplemented with a teaching session. This paved the way for an Indian surgeon who specializes in gynecologic oncology to visit the JGH for four months this past spring to observe numerous robot-assisted operations and report back on expanding India's fledgling robotics program.

Meanwhile, this summer, the Division of Gynecologic Oncology is further strengthening its international ties with the arrival of the latest Israeli Fellow to undertake three years' training in a combined JGH-McGill program.

"Creating and nurturing these relationships opens all kinds of doors," says Dr. Gotlieb, who for the past four years has sat



on the council of the International Gynecologic Cancer Society. "This gives us an opportunity to interact with medical leaders world-wide and to contribute significantly on a global level. And by 'us' I mean not just the Jewish General Hospital but, by extension, McGill, Quebec and Canada."

The ultimate beneficiaries of these global links are patients, says Dr. Gotlieb, "because the JGH is seen as being at the forefront of cancer treatment, research and robotic surgery. If I need a particular drug, or if I want a second opinion, or if I have to send a patient for a special referral, the doors are open."

This openness is what drew Dr. Anupama



Dr. Walter Gotlieb (above, left) with the JGH's da Vinci surgical robot.

Dr. Anupama Rajanbabu prepares to observe robot-assisted gynecologic surgery at the JGH.

Rajanbabu to the JGH in March to spend four months observing robot-assisted surgery in gynecologic oncology. "I've been watching about two sessions a week," says Dr. Rajanbabu, an Assistant Professor of Surgical Oncology with three years' experience at the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences in Kochi on India's southwest coast. "Even if there's some degree of consistency from one operation to the next, there's always something unique and different to see. A surgical robot training simulator is also available at the Jewish General Hospital, and that's very exciting to work on."

For the visiting Israeli Fellow, the JGH fulfills an important need, since sub-specialty

## Overseas assignments *Continued from page 9.*

is not to go beyond that first superficial image. But my experiences in Africa keep motivating me to push past that first impression; I become interested in their socio-economic status and their psycho-social situation. Those factors can have a huge impact on understanding the families' needs and how they can best cope with their baby's medical problems."

Mr. Lomenda says his stint in Njombe, where he was forced to quickly learn the basics of Swahili, taught him the importance of persevering despite significant obstacles. "The complexity of a case or situation can sometimes be overwhelming, but I now know that if you hit a wall, you've got no choice but to find a way around it. You look for new interventions and alternate ways

of working collaboratively with your colleagues and with members of the family."

This is not something a nurse can learn only by travelling halfway around the world, says Mr. Lomenda. "But being in Tanzania made an impression on me that I'll never forget. And it's made me just the kind of nurse that the JGH was looking for."

## Straddling the world for stroke research

training in gynecologic oncology is not offered in Israel because of the country's small population. But because it does have a need for expertise in that field, the Israel Cancer Research Fund has been sponsoring training for clinician-scientists. The fourth such trainee completed his two-year stint in late spring, with the position immediately refilled in early summer.

Dr. Gotlieb notes that his Division has also welcomed Dr. Darron Halliday, an observer from the Bahamas, whose experience proved so fruitful that the visitor published two papers during his stay at the JGH, resulting in his being accepted for a fellowship in Calgary. In addition, Dr. Sabuhi Qureshi, an Associate Professor from the CSM University in Lucknow, Northern India, is arriving this fall to spend four months at the JGH.

These efforts would not have been possible without hospital-wide collaboration and teamwork among doctors, nurses, administrative staff, JGH leaders and the donors who funded the robotics program through the JGH Foundation, Dr. Gotlieb adds. "It's wonderful to play this role in contributing to knowledge and expertise. By making our presence felt elsewhere and having people from other countries interacting with us in Montreal, we all get better at what we do."

The da Vinci surgical robot was brought to the JGH in 2007 through the generosity and initiative of private donors. This year, the JGH also acquired a stand-alone da Vinci surgical training simulator—to help develop surgeons' expertise and skills in robotic surgery—thanks to a generous donation from The Auxiliary.

Use of the robot has been extremely successful, with demand for this leading-edge technology growing at a pace that outstrips its availability. Acquisition of a second robot, with support from donors, will be vital in extending the benefits of robotic surgery to more people across Quebec and in preparing for its use in more types of surgery. Donations can be made in support of this vital initiative at [jghfoundation.org](http://jghfoundation.org) or by calling the JGH Foundation at 514-340-8251.

**Having come to Canada from Germany to pursue his research, Dr. Alexander Thiel now believes he has the best of both worlds: greater freedom to investigate patients' recovery from strokes, and the ability to maintain strong ties with top-calibre colleagues in Cologne and Munich.**

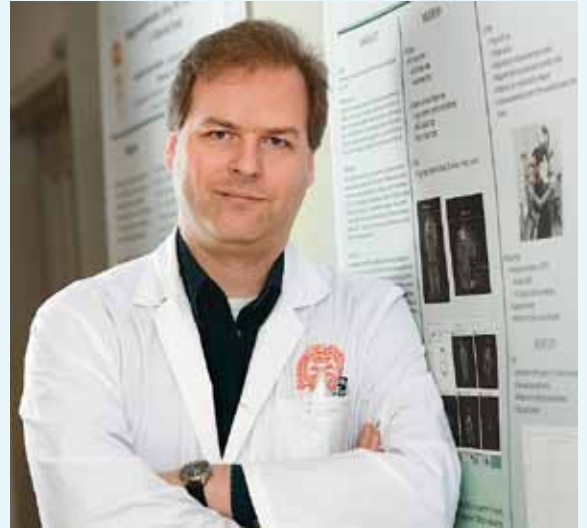
"Compared to Europe, Canada offers much greater independence to work at your own speed and to proceed in the scientific direction that seems most promising," says Dr. Thiel, who joined the Lady Davis Institute (LDI) at the JGH in 2006, where he serves as Director of the Neuroplasticity Research Program. In addition, he is Director of the JGH's Edmond J. Safra Stroke Centre and Associate Professor of Neurology and Neurosurgery at McGill University.

Since much of Dr. Thiel's research focuses on patients who are recruited into research studies, he says the connection to Germany enables many more patients to be studied. "What we're looking at can't be achieved in one site alone," he adds. "Multi-centre studies are the basis for our work."

After graduating from Bonn University's medical school in 1994, Dr. Thiel began his research training at the Max Planck Institute for Neurological Research in Cologne, followed by a fellowship in brain imaging at the Montreal Neurological Institute in 2000. He completed his residency in neurology and psychiatry at Cologne University, where he became a specialist in neurology in 2004.

Having come to Montreal in 2006, Dr. Thiel developed his neuroplasticity laboratory at the LDI and the JGH, the first non-invasive brain stimulation lab officially certified for clinical use in a stroke unit in Canada. It allows for serial studies in acute stroke patients from the early stages of disease to the early rehabilitation phase—the critical interval during which most neuroplastic processes in the brain occur.

In addition to working with German colleagues on brain stimulation, Dr. Thiel



Dr. Alexander Thiel

collaborates with colleagues in the brain imagery field at the University of Munich. This has involved bringing research fellows to Canada, as well as organizing last year's first Bavaria-Quebec molecular imaging symposium in Munich.

The Edmond J. Safra Stroke Centre was created in 2008 through the commitment and generosity of the Edmond J. Safra Philanthropic Foundation in Switzerland and the Maurice S. Peress family, along with a group of Montreal supporters led by Rona and Robert Davis. The Goodman family established the Rosalind and Morris Goodman & Family Endowment for the comprehensive Stroke Centre, enabling the JGH to recruit Dr. Thiel to head the Centre and support his leading-edge research. These are outstanding examples of how the JGH Foundation creates partnerships with donors to ensure that Quebecers benefit from the latest technologies and advances in patient care and research.