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Since Yale Urology opened a new clinic located at Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in New London, Connecticut in the summer of 2018, its MRI-US fusion biopsy program is one of many firsts that Dr. Joseph Renzulli and Dr. Joseph Brito have introduced to the Lawrence + Memorial community.

Dr. Renzulli and Brito are making full use of the existing expertise and facilities at the hospital, an affiliate of Yale New Haven Health. In particular, they are working closely with the diagnostic imaging department on the implementation of the MRI-US fusion biopsy program. In this two-stage procedure, patients first have an MRI taken of the prostate. At a subsequent biopsy appointment, the MRI images are fused with real-time ultrasound images to guide the urologist to suspicious areas from which to draw tissue samples.

“Until now, patients could have their MRIs done here, but they had to travel up to 50 miles for their biopsy,” Dr. Renzulli explained. “Now they can have both steps done in the same place.” For Bill Soboslai, it was a 10-minute drive from his home in Quaker Hill to Lawrence + Memorial Hospital for his MRI-US biopsy. Over the last two years, Mr. Soboslai had been experiencing a gradual increase of his PSA levels, which were initially dismissed as age-related. However, as they continued to rise while being checked every six months, Mr. Soboslai became concerned and asked his primary care doctor for a referral to Yale Urology’s Dr. Renzulli. “I didn’t know anything was wrong with me,” he said. “I have felt great and my energy level has always been high, but Dr. Renzulli said I needed the biopsy. Low and behold, he found that I had prostate cancer.”

“I really believe Dr. Renzulli is instrumental in saving my life with his prompt action,” Mr. Soboslai said. “Once hearing the diagnosis (of prostate cancer), you want everything to happen yesterday, but I am so pleased with how everyone has dotted their i’s and crossed their t’s.”

The community response in eastern Connecticut to the new Yale Urology clinic has been overwhelmingly warm and welcoming. “We’re been well received, not just by the hospital community but the patients as well,” said Dr. Brito. “There’s a big sense of excitement and relief that they can stay close to home and receive high-quality urologic care.”

In particular, their combined experience in performing robotic surgeries has changed the dynamic of urology care in the area. “Between the two of us, we’ve performed more than 1,500 robotic surgeries,” Dr. Renzulli said. “That’s more than most prostate cancer surgeries combined in institutions of this size.” Since the clinic opened, they’ve completed numerous robotic radical prostatectomies (removal of the prostate gland and surrounding tissues) and radical nephrectomies (removal of the kidney). They’re combining those robotic procedures with the ERAS protocol (Enhanced Recovery After Surgery) to speed patients’ return to health. “ERAS allows patients to have less pain after surgery, leave the hospital sooner and have a quicker return to normal activity,” Dr. Renzulli said. “It’s the same approach patients would receive on our main campus in New Haven.”

Indeed, prostate cancer patients are staying just overnight and kidney patients just one or two nights after robotic surgeries at Lawrence + Memorial Hospital. “Because of the benefits of robotics and the minimal recovery time and physiological impact, we can offer these surgeries at our community hospital,” Dr. Renzulli said. “Plus, in a smaller hospital environment, it’s easier for us to communicate with the other members of a patient’s care team and to schedule procedures and appointments quicker, with shorter wait times.”

After Mr. Soboslai’s cancer diagnosis, he was referred for follow-up care to the nearby Smilow Cancer Hospital Care Center in Waterford. “It is easy for those practitioners and for us to refer patients back and forth,” Dr. Renzulli said. “We work directly with the oncologists there and take a multidisciplinary approach to treat urologic cancers.”

And for Mr. Soboslai, the proximity to home is a plus. “These facilities at L+M Hospital with Dr. Renzulli and Smilow are only ten minutes from where my wife and I live, and given the circumstance, I am very grateful.” Dr. Brito echoes his statements, adding, “We wanted to be able to provide more cutting-edge technology and care in the area but still have quality face-to-face interactions with our patients. Being in a community hospital environment gives us that opportunity.”

Both native Rhode Islanders, Drs. Brito and Renzulli first met in Providence, at the Alpert Medical School of Brown University. Dr. Brito trained under Dr. Renzulli during his residency where the two conducted urologic oncology research together. Now, the two are working in step again, serving the New London, Connecticut community. In 2019 they will be joined by a third urologist, Dr. Timothy Tran, who will focus on the care of patients with stone disease, offering additional comprehensive care to patients in the area.