

## Robot-Assisted Radical Cystectomy for Bladder Cancer: Single-Center Experience

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### Abstract

**Objective:** Radical cystectomy remains the most effective treatment for patients with localized, invasive bladder cancer and recurrent noninvasive disease. Recently some surgeons have begun to describe outcomes associated with less invasive surgical approaches to this disease, such as laparoscopic or robotic assisted techniques. We report our maturing experience with 100 consecutive cases of robotic assisted laparoscopic radical cystectomy regarding perioperative results, pathological outcomes, and surgical complications.

**Materials and Methods:** A total of 100 consecutive patients (73 male and 27 female) underwent robotic radical cystectomy with intracorporeal urinary diversion at our institution from February 2018 to February 2021 for clinically localized bladder cancer. Outcome measures evaluated included operative variables, hospital recovery, pathological outcomes, and complication rate.

**Results:** The mean age of this cohort was 60.4 years (range 38 to 82). Ninety-five patients underwent ileal conduit diversion, 5 received a neobladder). The mean operating room time for all patients was 184 min and mean surgical blood loss was 286 ml. On surgical pathology, 2% of the cases were pT1, 35% were pT2, 51+12% were pT3/T4 disease and 17% were node positive. The mean number of lymph nodes removed was 16 (range 10 to 40). In no case was there a positive surgical margin. The mean days to flatus were 2.6, bowel movement 2.8 and discharge home 8.2. There were 21 postoperative complications in 20 patients with 4% having a major complication (Clavien grade 3 or higher) and 15% being readmitted within 30 days after surgery. At a mean follow-up of 12 months 3 patients had disease recurrence and died 4 of disease.

**Conclusions:** We report a relatively large cohort and maturing experience with robotic radical cystectomy for the treatment of bladder cancer, providing acceptable surgical and pathological outcomes. These results support continued efforts to refine the surgical management of muscle-invasive bladder cancer.

**Keywords:** Radical Cystectomy; Bladder Cancer; Robot-Assisted; Umbilical

### Introduction

More than 500,000 new cases of bladder cancer are diagnosed each year in both sexes and all ages in the world. The prevalence of this type of tumor is 3% of all malignancies in the global population [1]. Radical cystectomy is a generally recognized standard of surgical care for patients in the world medical community, although this manipulation is associated with significant perioperative complications, longer hospital stays [2] and increased mortality [3]. In order to reduce the number of surgical complications after an open

cystectomy, minimally invasive manipulation techniques have been developed. Robot-assisted radical cystectomy (RARC) show less surgical complications, as proven in a number of major studies [4-8]. Moreover, RARC appears to be a more promising method than a laparoscopic one, with a number of technical and functional advantages [9]. Recently, there has been an increasing interest in RARC from the urological community, which has led to an increase in the frequency of using RARC as the selection for treatment of bladder cancer [10-11].

Patients and Methods

We performed RARC for 100 patients by using a four-arm da Vinci SI robotic system (Intuitive Surgical, CA, USA) between February 2018 and February 2021. Demographics, operative data, postoperative outcomes, and complications were recorded for each patient. The patient data are presented in table 1. Robotic surgery was performed in the Clinic of Bashkir State Medical University by one experienced surgeon. The RARC was begun with intracorporeal diversions in all cases. We performed extended pelvic lymph node dissection (ePLND) along with cystectomy for all patients. The lymph node was dissected as the level of extended template in all patients by removing the obturator, external iliac, common iliac, and presacral lymph nodes. In ileal conduit, a segment of the ileum of 20 cm was isolated and used for urinary diversion. The distal ends of both ureters were anastomosed to the ileum by the Wallace I or II technique. Ileal construction was performed according to the Studer reservoir for orthotopic neobladder. Our RARC procedure is described in detail below. Postoperative early (0 - 30 days) and late (31 - 90 days) complications were evaluated using the modified Clavien-Dindo system. Minor complications were placed in Clavien category 1 - 2 and major complications in category 3 - 5.

| RARC (n = 100)                |              |
|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Age, year, mean               | 60,4 (38-82) |
| BMI, kg/m <sup>2</sup> , mean | 29.5 (3.9)   |
| Male, n (%)                   | 83 (83%)     |
| ASA grade, n (%)              |              |
| ASA1                          | 10           |
| ASA2                          | 58           |
| ASA3                          | 32           |

Table 1: Patient characteristics.

ASA= American Society of Anesthesiologists; BMI= Body Mass Index.

| RARC                 | 100 patients |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Clinical Stage       |              |
| cT1                  | 4            |
| cT2                  | 38           |
| cT3                  | 49           |
| cT4                  | 9            |
| Tumor grade (biopsy) |              |
| G1                   | 4            |
| G2                   | 44           |
| G3                   | 52           |

Table 2: Oncological characteristics.

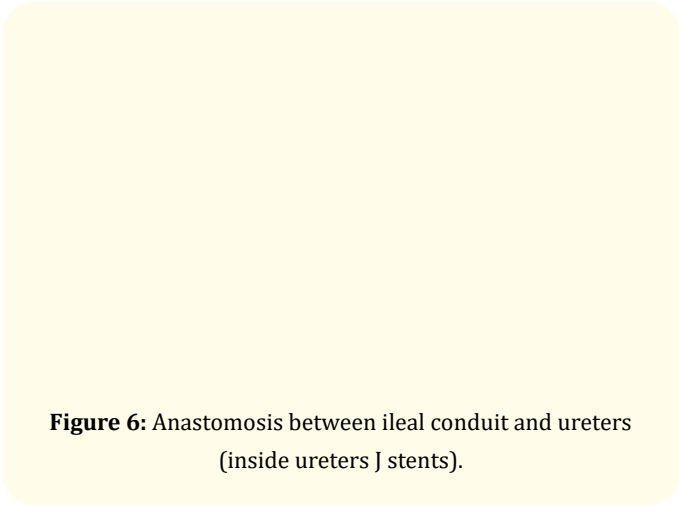
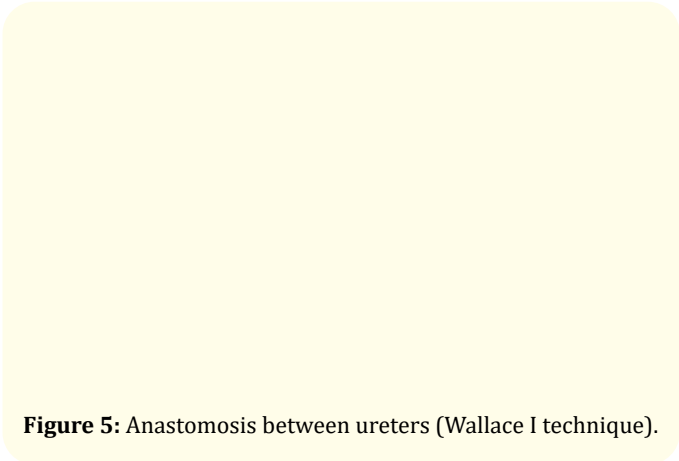
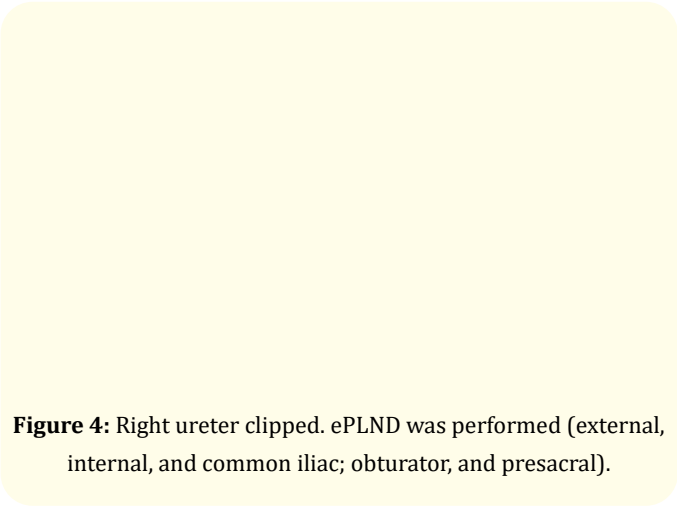
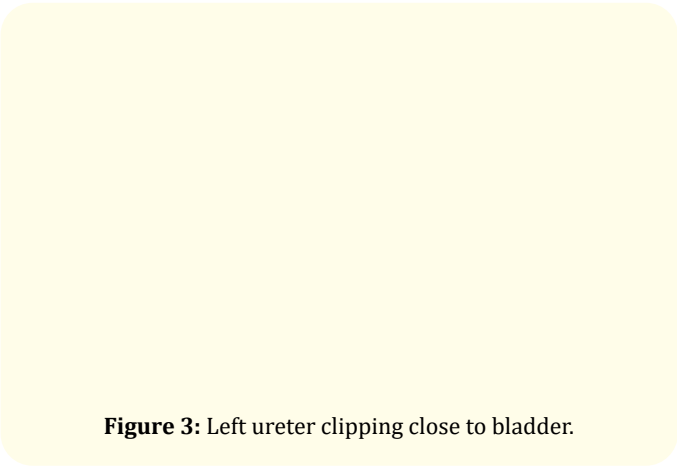
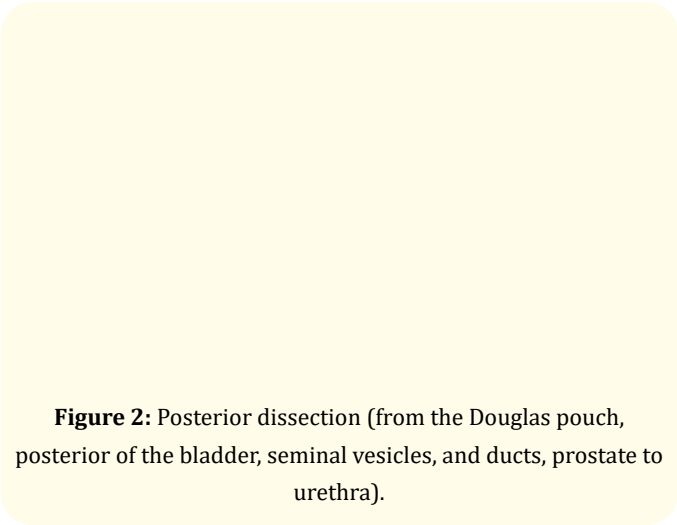
Preoperational clinical stages included: 4 (4%) patients at cT1, 38 (38%) patients at cT2, 49 (49%) patients at pT3 and 9 (9%) patients at cT4.

Surgery technique

First 10-mm port for camera was placed in the middle of umbilicus and processus *xiphoideus*. After pneumoperitoneum - three 8-mm robotic ports: two were placed on the right side and one on the left. One of the right ports was at the same area where ileostomy was to be done. Two assistance ports were placed at the end laterally (8 mm) and medially (10 mm) on the left side, and an 8-mm port was placed for robotic arm between the assistance ports (Figure 1). The patient was moved to a 30° Trendelenburg position and docking of the robot arms was performed. The surgeon used two right robotic arms and one left. This position improves working in two anatomic area (for cystectomy and for ileal reconstruction).

We commenced dissection from the Douglas pouch, posterior of the bladder, seminal vesicles, and ducts, prostate to urethra (Figure 2). Lymphadenectomy was an integral part of radical cystectomy. After posterior dissection we opened right common ileac vessels with lymph node dissection from bifurcation to bladder pedicles to endopelvic fascia. During this procedure we were clipping a. vesicles inferior and a. umbilical is. The right ureter was clipped close to bladder (Figure 3). The rectum and sigmoid colon were moved to the right, and an analogical dissection was made from bifurcation on the left side. At the end of lymphadenectomy, left ureter was being passed behind mesentery to the left side. Lymphadenectomy was performed to cover the external, internal, and common iliac, obturator, and presacral LNs (bilateral ePLND) (Figure 4). Anterior dissection was started from urachus by the plica umbilical is medialis to the front side of the bladder and prostate until urethra. Urethra cut and organ complex were moved to endobag. Two ureters on the left side were anastomosed to the ureters by the Wallace technique using 4/0 vicryl (Figure 5). The ileal pouch was formed using the 20-cm ileal segment, proximally 20 cm from the ileocecal valve, and the remaining intestinal segment was anastomosed with a stapler. Mono J ureter stents were placed in both ureters, and the ileal pouch was anastomosed (Figure 6).

Figure 1: Port placement for RARC.



Results

A total of 100 patients (73 men, 27 women) who underwent RARC and ePLND were included in the study, of whom 95 (95%) received intracorporeal ileal conduit, 5 (5%) received intracorporeal orthotopic neobladder. The mean age of the patients was 60.4 ± 9.09 years. The mean operation time was 184 ± 86 minutes, and the mean estimated blood loss was 286 ± 91 mL. The mean lodge drain and hospitalization time were 7.4 ± 3.4 and 8.2 ± 5.1 days, respectively. Demographics and operative parameters are shown in table 3.

Postoperative pathologic stages were pT1 (n = 2), pT2 (n = 35), pT3 (n = 51), and pT4 (n = 12). In pT4 patients, invasions were seen in the prostate (n = 5), vagina, uterus (n = 5), and seminal vesicle (2). Three patients had concomitant prostate cancer (Glea-

| Variable                                    | Number of patients, n 100 |
|---|---------------------------|
| Sex Male/Female                             | 73/27                     |
| Urinary diversion type, n (%)               |                           |
| Ileal conduit (Bricker)                     | 15 (26.34%)               |
| Neobladder (Studer)                         | 17 (29.8%)                |
| Mean operative time, minutes ( $\pm$ SD)    | 184 $\pm$ 86              |
| Mean estimated blood loss, mL ( $\pm$ SD)   | 286 $\pm$ 91              |
| Mean hospitalization time, days ( $\pm$ SD) | 8.2 $\pm$ 5.1             |
| Mean removal drain time, days ( $\pm$ SD)   | 7.4 $\pm$ 3.4             |
| Mean follow-up, months ( $\pm$ SD)          | 12.1 $\pm$ 3.2            |

**Table 3:** Patient's characteristics.

son score 3 + 3). In our Clinic all patients who had cT3-4 underwent neoadjuvant chemotherapy prior to cystectomy. Adjuvant chemotherapy was offered to patients who had pT3-4 and/or LN metastasis. The distribution of pathology outcomes is presented in table 3.

The mean follow-up period was 12.1  $\pm$  3.2 months, and 4 patients died during follow-up, of whom 2 died due to bladder cancer and 2 due to cardiac (1) and pulmonary (1) diseases. Three patients had local or distant metastasis, and they all received chemotherapy for metastasis.

| RARC 100           |    |
|--------------------|----|
| Clinical stage     |    |
| pT1                | 2  |
| pT2                | 35 |
| pT3                | 51 |
| pT4                | 12 |
| Pathological stage |    |
| pG1                | 1  |
| pG2                | 54 |
| pG3                | 45 |
| Lymph node yield   |    |
| N0                 | 87 |
| N1                 | 12 |
| N2                 | 5  |

**Table 4:** Pathological outcomes.

Complications occurred in 18 (18%) patients during the early (0 - 30 days) period and 7 (7%) patients in the late (31 - 90 days)

period. The complication rates according to the number and management of the complications are presented in tables 5 and 6, respectively.

| Complications                 | N | Management                                 |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Anemia                        | 5 | Blood transfusion                          |
| Lymphocele                    | 2 | Observation                                |
| Ureteroileal anastomosis leak | 4 | Nephrostomy                                |
| Wound infection               | - |  |
| Ileioileal anastomosis leak   | 2 | Laparotomy. Ileostomy. Ureterocutaneostomy |
| Urinary infection             | 3 | parenteral antibiotic treatment            |
| Ileus                         | 4 | parenteral serotonin receptor agonists     |
| Deep vein thrombosis          | 1 | Anticoagulant treatment                    |

**Table 5:** 30-day complications.

| Complications                                      |   | Management                      |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Hydronephrosis/ Ureteroileal anastomosis stricture | 2 | Nephrostomy                     |
| Urinary infection                                  | 5 | Parenteral antibiotic treatment |

**Table 6:** 90-day complications.

## Discussion

The current state of minimally invasive surgery in urology is characterized by high relevance and perspective. This advance is well appreciated after the long stagnation of traditional methods of surgical treatment of urinary tract pathologies. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, there was a sharp jump in surgical assistance for the treatment of urological diseases because of the advent of the breakthrough method of robot-assisted intervention. This high-tech method has demonstrated its superiority and high standard to all areas of surgical practice. However, more solid evidence for validating its efficacy is needed with well-designed large-scale randomized clinical trials. The results documented by Feng, *et al.* [12], as by many other teams on the same subject, show the superiority of RARC before open surgery in terms of surgical criteria, except for the time of surgery. Fonseca, *et al.* [13] reported that RARC

requires a longer operating time but shorter hospitalization time compared to other technologies. Also, many researchers have noticed the comparability of early cancer outcomes following robotic right colectomy (RRC) and conventional laparoscopic right colectomy (LRC) and the advantages of these technologies over the open radical cystectomy [14,15].

In the current study, the mean operation time was  $184 \pm 86$  minutes and the blood loss was  $286 \pm 91$  mL. International Robotic Cystectomy Consortium [16] reported operation time of 371 minutes and blood loss of 300 mL, whereas Khan, *et al.* [18] reported 389 minutes and 585 mL, respectively. Our study showed shorter operation time than the published studies. Porreca, *et al.* [17,19] reported that operation time and blood loss decreased depending on the experience at the learning curve: operation time decreased from 399 to 373 minutes and blood loss from 425 to 250 mL compared with the first 24 cases and the last 34 cases. We observed the same correlation in our study.

Shorter lodge drain and hospitalization time and lower complication rates are important advantages of RARC over open radical cystectomy (ORC). Previous studies reported hospitalization time of 4 - 17.1 days [20-21]. In the current study, the hospitalization time was  $8.2 \pm 5.1$  days, and the duration of lodge drain was  $7.4 \pm 3.4$  days, which are similar to the literature data. Nonetheless, implementation of the enhanced post-surgery recovery program in our center significantly shortened hospitalization time and lodge drain duration.

It has been addressed that low complication rate is an important advantage of RARC [22]. Canda, *et al.* [23] reported a minor complication rate of 33.3% and a major complication rate of 14.81% within the period of 0-30 days, which were reduced to 14.81% and 11.11%, respectively, after a prolonged period of 30 - 90 days. Schumacher, *et al.* [24] reported 40% (17.78% minor, 22.22% major) complication rates in the early phase and 30% (13.33% minor, 17.77% major) complication rates in the late phase of their RARC series. International Robotic Cystectomy Consortium reported the overall complication and major complication rates of 50% and 11%, respectively, in their multicenter study [16]. Our early- (0 - 30 days period) and late-phase (31 - 90 days period) complication rates were 18% and 7%, respectively.

Collectively, the results we have obtained strengthen the position of RARC as the mainstay procedure for bladder cancer treatment.

## Conclusion

The robotic radical cystectomies we performed for the treatment of bladder cancer indicate that this type of surgical intervention has performed well enough, providing positive results in the postoperative dynamics of patient management. To confirm or refute our results, it is necessary to conduct further studies with a large number of patients or combine the results of our center with others. Joint efforts to improve the surgical treatment of muscle-invasive bladder cancer will facilitate the complete replacement of standard laparoscopic robotic surgeries. Thus, it is possible to improve the quality of life of patients, as well as facilitate the rehabilitation period.

## Study Limitation

We report that the sample of patients is not large enough to be able to predict a positive outcome in the treatment of muscle-invasive bladder cancer with the highest possible probability. To do this, it is necessary to combine the data we received with data from other research centers.

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