



Baptist Health's new germ-zapping robots use ultraviolet light as a disinfectant

A small fleet of Xenex germ-zapping robots has been deployed at three Baptist Health campuses as part of an ongoing effort to control hospital-acquired infections.

The seven Baptist robots, which resemble the robot R2D2 from the “Star Wars” movies, uses xenon pulsed ultraviolet light to destroy microorganisms.

Studies have found the technology effective against the bacteria that cause such infections as MRSA and C. diff, as well as such viruses as the Ebola virus.

Four of Baptist Health’s seven robots have been deployed at Baptist Medical Center Jacksonville. They have been in use for several months helping disinfect such areas as operating rooms. Two robots are in use at Baptist Medical Center South and one at Baptist Medical Center Beaches.

This week the hospitals began using the robots to disinfect patient rooms, either after a patient is discharged, or, in some cases, while a patient is out of the room for a test or procedure. The robots can disinfect a room in 5-10 minutes.

Using the robots “doesn’t replace good old hand hygiene” but effectively supplements it, said Kristin Vondrak, Baptist Health’s vice president and chief quality officer.

A team of technicians from Baptist Health’s environmental services staff has undergone training in how to use the robots. Nobody can be in a room when the robot is in operation because the ultraviolet light can do damage to eyes and skin. However, it is safe to observe the robots through glass windows since ultraviolet light doesn’t penetrate glass.

The robot stands three feet tall when it is being transported but it has a “neck” that can raise its “head,” which contains the xenon bulb, to 5 feet 2 inches tall.

The light from the xenon bulb is particularly effective against germs because its includes UVC rays, said Rachel Sparks, a spokeswoman for Xenex Disinfection Services, which makes the robot. The UVC in sunlight is blocked by the ozone in the earth’s atmosphere. As a result, germs have not developed a resistance to it.

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