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Robots sway the surgeons

BY KAREN GARLOCH
STAFF WRITER

A pioneer in robot-assisted heart surgery, East Carolina University's Dr. Randolph Chitwood takes issue with recent criticisms of the surgery.

Patients who have had prostate cancer surgery using the da Vinci robot are said to have more complications than those who get the traditional, open-incision prostatectomy.

However, Chitwood said the study in the Journal of the American Medical Association in October didn't distinguish between surgeons who performed conventional laparoscopic surgery and those using the da Vinci robot. It also didn't differentiate between surgeons who had done 50 surgeries a year and those who had done 200, he said.

“We know that high-volume centers generally get better results,” said Chitwood, chief of cardiovascular surgery at ECU and the first surgeon in the U.S. to use the robot to repair a mitral valve, in 2000.

The JAMA article compared open

SEE SURGEONS, PAGE 2D

SURGEONS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1D

prostate cancer surgery to laparoscopic surgery and found that laparoscopic patients have less blood loss, less pain and quicker recoveries, but more problems with impotence and incontinence.

The study covered 2003-07, when the technique was new. If the study were done today, Chitwood said, the results would be different because surgeons are now more proficient. “If you have somebody that’s done 500 prostatectomies,” he said, “I can guarantee they’re going to have less complications that somebody doing 50.”

How it works

A robot-assisted surgery looks like science fiction. Instead of standing beside the patient, surgeons sit at a console like an arcade game with a 3-D viewer, hand controls and foot pedals. The huge robot with three spiderlike arms hovers overhead.

The ends of each arm reach through small incisions in the patient’s chest. Two arms have tiny pincers attached; the third holds a camera that projects a view of the heart, magnified 12 times. When the surgeon moves his hands and feet at the console, the robot’s arms respond, grasping and cutting, as the doctor watches on his viewer.

Chitwood said the robot should be used to enhance the work of a surgeon who is already proficient. “You have to have a basic knowledge and a significant volume of patients that you’ve done in traditional fashion before you start moving into robotics,” he said. “Robotic technology is an instrument; it’s not a surgeon. What it does is give you better access through small incisions. It doesn’t make you a better surgeon.”

Chitwood has performed more than 600 robot-assisted surgeries to repair mitral valves, and he has trained many heart surgeons who use it.

East Carolina and its affiliated hospital, Pitt County Memorial, have three da Vinci robots, including one in a training lab. There are several in the Triangle. WakeMed has one at its main campus in Raleigh and one in Cary. Rex Healthcare has two. Duke University has four, two at Duke Hospital, one at Duke Health Raleigh and one at Durham Regional Hospital. UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill has two and is buying a third.

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February 14, 2010

Results Unproven, Robotic Surgery Wins Converts

By GINA KOLATA

At age 42, Dr. Jeffrey A. Cadeddu felt like a dinosaur in urologic surgery. He was trained to take out cancerous prostates the traditional laparoscopic way: making small incisions in the abdomen and inserting tools with his own hands to slice out the organ.

But now, patient after patient was walking away. They did not want that kind of surgery. They wanted surgery by a robot, controlled by a physician not necessarily even in the operating room, face buried in a console, working the robot’s arms with remote controls.

“Patients interview you,” said Dr. Cadeddu, a urologist at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. “They say: ‘Do you use the robot? O.K., well, thank you.’ “ And they leave.

On one level, robot-assisted surgery makes sense. A robot’s slender arms can reach places human hands cannot, and robot-assisted surgery is spreading to other areas of medicine.

But robot-assisted prostate surgery costs more — about $1,500 to $2,000 more per patient. And it is not clear whether its outcomes are better, worse or the same.

One large national study, which compared outcomes among Medicare patients, indicated that surgery with a robot might lead to fewer in-hospital complications, but that it might also lead to more impotence and incontinence. But the study included conventional laparoscopy patients among the ones who had robot-assisted surgery, making it difficult to assess its conclusions.

It is also not known whether robot-assisted prostate surgery gives better, worse or equivalent long-term cancer control than the traditional methods, either with a four-inch incision or with smaller incisions and a laparoscope. And researchers know of no large studies planned or under way.

Meanwhile, marketing has moved into the breach, with hospitals and surgeons advertising their services with claims that make critics raise their eyebrows. For example, surgeons in private practice at the New Jersey Center for Prostate Cancer and Urology advertise on their Web site that robot-assisted surgery provides “cancer cure equally as well as traditional prostate surgery” and “significantly improved urinary control.”

Robot-assisted prostate surgery has grown at a nearly unprecedented rate.

Last year, 73,000 American men — 86 percent of the 85,000 who had prostate cancer surgery — had robot-assisted operations, according to the robot’s maker, Intuitive Surgical, the only official source of such data. Eight years ago there were fewer than 5,000, Intuitive says.

Dr. Sean R. Tunis, director of the Center for Medical Technology Policy, a nonprofit organization that evaluates medical technology, said few other procedures had made such rapid inroads in medicine.

Medical researchers say the robot situation is emblematic of a more general issue. New technology has sometimes led to big advances, which can justify extra costs. But often, technology spreads long before investigators know
whether it is worthwhile.

With drugs, the Food and Drug Administration requires extensive tests to determine safety and efficacy. But surgeons are free to innovate, and few would argue that surgery can or should be held to the same standards as drugs. Still, a situation like robot-assisted surgery illustrates how patients may end up making what can be life-changing decisions based on little more than assertive marketing or the personal prejudices of their surgeon.

“There is no question there is a lot of marketing hype,” said Dr. Gerald L. Andriole Jr., chief of urologic surgery at Washington University. Dr. Andriole does laparoscopic prostate surgery, and although he tried the robot, he went back to the old ways.

“I just think that in this particular instance, with this particular robot,” he said, “there hasn’t been a quantum leap in anything.”

Evaluating technology is complicated. As often happens in surgery, doctors can become enthusiasts without rigorous studies ever being done.

And with prostate cancer, more is at stake than just an academic dispute, said Dr. Jason D. Engel, director of urologic robotic surgery at George Washington University Medical Center in Washington. One in six American men develop prostate cancer in their lifetime. Treatment options include radiation and watchful waiting, but the most popular is surgery.

“With the stream of prostate cancer patients that come through,” Dr. Engel said, “this is a big, big business.”

Dr. Michael J. Barry, a professor of medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, said that once a hospital invests in a robot — $1.39 million for the machine and $140,000 a year for the service contract, according to Intuitive — it has an incentive to use it. Doctors and patients become passionate advocates, assuming that newer means better.

“Doctors and medical centers advertise it, and patients demand it,” Dr. Barry said, creating a “folie a deux.”

The robot’s ability to reach into small spaces comes with tradeoffs. Ordinarily, doctors can feel how forcefully they are grabbing tissue, how well they are cutting, how their stitches are holding. With the robot, that is lost. And the robot is slow; it typically takes three and a half hours for a prostate operation, according to Intuitive, twice as long as traditional surgery.

A few highly experienced doctors are much faster. Dr. Vipul Patel, for example, at Florida Hospital in Celebration, Fla., has done more than 3,500 robot-assisted prostate surgeries. He often does six a day, taking about one and a half hours for each.

“From Day 1, when I sat down at that robotic console, I knew we would give patients a better outcome,” Dr. Patel said. “I have not seen anyone who has done a good amount of robotic surgery go back.”

Dr. Patel also started The Journal of Robotic Surgery to provide a forum, he said. Dr. Engel said he and others who use robots welcome it. They had had difficulty getting published in traditional journals, Dr. Engel said.

But papers in the new journal tend to report on one surgeon’s experience. Studies like that, which were also published in the past to promote traditional surgery, have methodological problems — biases in patient selection and evaluation are likely and, because the surgeons tend to be much better than average, it is hard to generalize.

In contrast, the national study of Medicare patients from 2003 to 2007, by Dr. Jim C. Hu of Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, included 6,899 men who had surgery with four-inch incisions and 1,938 who had laparoscopic surgery, many with a robot.
The study was not ideal — patients were not randomly assigned to have one type of surgery or another, and laparoscopic operations done without a robot were included with the robot-assisted ones because Medicare did not distinguish between the two. But it is the only large national study that compares what is thought to be a largely robot-assisted surgery group with a group that did not have a robot.

The paper, published last October in The Journal of the American Medical Association, found that laparoscopic surgery patients had shorter hospital stays, lower transfusion rates and fewer respiratory and surgical complications. But they also had more incontinence and impotence.

It is not known whether the extra costs of robot-assisted surgery are balanced by lower costs for shorter hospital stays and fewer surgical complications.

Experts in robotic surgery say studies like Dr. Hu's can be misleading. Medicare data, they say, include results from surgeons who may have little experience with robots.

Dr. Barry, an author of Dr. Hu's paper, said Medicare data reflect the real world. "Everyone tends to cite data from centers of excellence as though they were their own," he said.

Highly skilled surgeons, like Dr. Ashutosh K. Tewari at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York, say it takes about 200 to 300 robot-assisted operations to become highly proficient. Dr. Tewari has done 3,200.

Surgeons who do nonrobotic prostate surgery agree.

"What happens is that if you take leading experts, whether they do open or robotic, they are going to get good results," said Dr. Herbert Lepor of New York University, who has done more than 4,000 traditional open prostatectomies.

"I say robotic surgery has to be better to justify its learning curve," Dr. Lepor said, "to justify its unknown cancer control, to justify its increased cost."

Both traditional surgeons and those who do robot-assisted surgery point to patients who did extremely well.

Among them is James Lamb, a 40-year-old New York City police officer who had robot-assisted surgery with Dr. Tewari on Jan. 5. Two days later, while he was in the hospital and still had a catheter in his penis, Officer Lamb had an erection.

Two days after that, Officer Lamb said, he was home and had sexual intercourse. (In one study by Dr. Barry, which surveyed patients a year after surgery, only half the men, regardless of surgical method, were back to their presurgery potency a year later, with or without the use of a drug like Viagra.)

But, Dr. Barry and Dr. Tewari note, an extraordinary patient or two can be misleading. "The message for patients is not to assume that newer is better," Dr. Barry said. Measures like the number of operations a surgeon has done "still matter a lot," he said.

Dr. Cadeddu, though, said that sort of message is falling on deaf ears. Patients want the robot. So Dr. Cadeddu has now begun offering robot-assisted surgery to those who want it.

"The battle is lost," Dr. Cadeddu added. "Marketing is driving the case here."
ECU biologists help make discovery

BY JOSH HUMPHRIES
The Daily Reflector

A team of biologists, including two from East Carolina University, discovered the first confirmed species of monogamous amphibian in Peru.

The Ranitomeya imitator, better known as the mimic poison frog, has only one mate in the course of at least one mating season, researchers found.

Kyle Summers, an ECU biology professor, authored the study with Jason L. Brown, a former ECU graduate student who is now a researcher at Duke University, and Victor Morales of Ricardo Palma University in Lima, Peru.

"The reason that we think it is important is that we have been able to relate a single ecological factor to a fairly broad part of the social and reproduction system of these frogs," Summers said. "This is a key goal of ecology, in general, and especially as it relates to behavior."

The scientists' work, which is to be published in the April issue of The American Naturalist, may be the most solid evidence that monogamy can have a single ecological cause.

The researchers found that the mimic poison frog's reproduction cycle includes the use of small pools of water, care by both parents including egg-feeding, and the pairs mate multiple times.

FROG

Continued from A4

The isolated parts of Peru where the frogs are found prevent researchers from determining long-term mating patterns, Summers said.

"When we go back, we don't see the same frogs," he said. "It is possible that they mate for life, but we can't say that for sure. But for four to five months, they breed every few weeks and are monogamous."

The researchers believe that the differences in parental care and mating systems between these and otherwise similar frog species stems from the lack of resources in the small breeding pools of water.

The tadpole of the mimic poison frog grows in a much smaller, less nutrient-dense pool that forms in the folds of tree leaves.

The male takes tadpoles there they hatch and monitors them in the months following birth.

About once a week, the male calls for his female partner, who lays non-fertile eggs for the tadpoles to eat.

Summers said the frogs have a home range of about 10 meters.

In contrast to the mimic poison frog, the variable poison frog raises its tadpoles in larger pools, and the rearing of young is handled mostly by the male.

The researchers used genetic analyses based on techniques similar to the DNA-based forensic methods used for paternity cases to investigate the mating system of the mimic poison frog.

All but one of the families investigated were completely genetically monogamous, they found.

Genetic testing has shown many animals thought to practice social monogamy to be less faithful than believed.

"Monogamy turns out to be relatively rare, even in birds and mammals — particularly in mammals — and reptiles," Summers said. "Finding a frog that has a monogamous mating system was pretty novel for us."

The research is drawing attention throughout the world, including BBC World News, radio stations in New Zealand and Canada, Science magazine, Discovery magazine and the New York Times, Summers said.

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@reflector.com or (252) 329-9565.
Health officials urge action against H1N1 threat

BY MARK RUTLEDGE
The Daily Reflector

An expected third wave of the H1N1 flu virus has yet to materialize, but the virus has not gone away, and public health officials are toeing the line on the importance of being vaccinated.

The Pitt County Health Department and student health officials at East Carolina University are continuing to urge college students and the general population to be vaccinated.

"The bottom line is we are still seeing hundreds of hospitalizations in North Carolina, and we’re up to 92 deaths in the state now," Dr. John Morrow, director of the Pitt County Health Department, said.

Treatment of patients with flu-like symptoms was higher in the fall at both the health department and ECU’s Student Health Center. Both agencies, however, are steadfast in recommending that everyone older than 6 months receive the free vaccine.

Because of initial eligibility standards issued when the H1N1 pandemic started last spring, Morrow said there remains some confusion about who is eligible for the vaccine.

"Anybody over 6 months of age should have the vaccine," he said. "The only reason not to be vaccinated is if you have an egg allergy."

Another persistent point of confusion is about the cost of the vaccine.

"Many people still think we’re going to bill their insurance or something, but we’re not doing any of that," Morrow said. "It’s just free for the taking."

Morrow estimates that about 55,000 doses of the vaccine have been given in Pitt County since April. His department is continuing its awareness programs, particularly among minority populations, which have been more reluctant to seek the vaccine.

At ECU, treatment of flu-like symptoms has fallen significantly since the spring semester began, according to Ellen Goldberg, nurse manager at the Student Health Center.

"From summer through the end of 2009, we saw 309 flu-like cases," she said.

That compares to 50 flu-like cases seen at the Student Health Center during 2010.

Despite the lower rates of infection, the university continues urging students to be vaccinated.

There is normally a spike in flu-like symptoms among students after spring break, Goldberg said.

With students just back from spring break, getting the vaccine is an especially good idea.

"Historically, the flu does come in waves," Goldberg said. "We’re looking for that (post-spring break) peak. We want to be on the proactive side of it instead of waiting until we’re inundated again."

Contact Mark Rutledge at mrutledge@reflector.com.

H1N1 VACCINE

Free H1N1 flu vaccines are available at the Pitt County Health Department, 201 Government Circle, from 8:30-11:30 a.m. and from 1-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday.

ECU students can receive the vaccine at the Student Health Center by appointment. For more information, call 902-2305.
NC State University's campus now tells its own story as you walk through it.

An online map, dubbed WolfWalk by university library officials who introduced it last week, has made the campus interactive by taking advantage of the location-sensing abilities of smart phones.

As people walk on campus, their phones can display old photos and historical information about buildings and other key features, allowing self-guided history tours.

The idea is to bring the university's trove of archived material to a fresh audience, said David Hiscoe, director of communication strategies for the NCSU libraries.

"Not only can you find a place, but you can find out what it looked like 20 years ago, or 100 years ago, and what it means to the university," Hiscoe said.

The map also could lay the groundwork for more elaborate versions, he said.

Increasingly, universities such as NCSU, UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke are tailoring information sources for smart phones so students, faculty and staff have easy access to materials such as maps, directories, calendars and the current location of campus buses.

WolfWalk can be used as a standard online campus map, but it adds a layer of historical data. Stroll near Page Hall, for example, and your Android or iPhone will kick up old photos of the building along with information about its namesake, Walter Hines Page, a member of Cary's founding family, an ambassador to Great Britain and a founder of NCSU.

The initial version of the map includes information about more than 50 sites on campus, and there are plans to add more. It also may be possible later to add features such as oral histories and archival video, said Tito Sierra, the associate head for digital library development, who led the WolfWalk project.

It could even morph into a tool with "augmented reality" features that would allow users to point a smart phone camera at a building or street and have information about it pop up on the screen.

The library, nationally known for its focus on technology, already has a special mobile Web site for library users, allowing them to look up items in the catalog or telling them which computers in the library aren't in use. There is even a Web cam to check the length of the line at the library coffee shop.

The library also introduced an upgraded version of its "Historical State" Web site last week, which allows people more easily to explore the university's 123-year history in depth via material that includes archived photos of the campus and campus life, and digitized versions of old yearbooks and course catalogs.

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Salary histories are kept from the public

Last of three parts

A year ago, Altavis Pratt was the grant writer and crime statistician for the State Capitol Police when her position fell victim to budget cuts and questions regarding her duties.

Pratt, who was being paid $38,000 annually, did not leave the agency. Chief Scott Hunter moved her into a lesser position as a dispatcher and continued to pay her the same salary. She now makes $8,000 to $10,000 more than all but the chief dispatcher, in a position the agency had left unfilled for more than a year.

Such personnel moves often escape scrutiny because the state's personnel law does not allow the public to see an employee's work history, other than when he or she was first hired. Position changes, rapid salary growth, overtime payments and demotions from prior years can be hidden because the personnel law allows only current information to be released.

It's a 35-year-old hurdle that no other state appears to have, according to a review of personnel laws in the other 49 states.

"That just strikes me as utterly illogical," Charles Davis, executive director of the National Freedom of Information Coalition, said of North Carolina's law. "If you can get their salary now, why can't you get it two years ago? What's the argument there?"

Actually, few people can cite a specific reason for the secrecy. Representatives for employee and governmental groups can't explain the need for it.

"By and large, I don't see a problem with being able to disclose the historical salaries of state employees or the historical nature of what their job titles and duties were," said Dana Cope, executive director of the State Employees Association of North Carolina.

'A lot of turmoil'

But government officials cite the law to deny information. In the case of Pratt, an Office of State Personnel spokeswoman said she could not state what Pratt did before she became a dispatcher.

"Only current position is public," spokeswoman Margaret Jordan said by e-mail.

Pratt declined comment. Hunter confirmed the move, saying the Department of Administration cut her position because she wasn't bringing in sufficient grant money. He said the department did not want to punish her financially for taking a lesser position, so she was kept at the same salary.

The result, however, is no money saved from that job cut, as the agency added a sixth dispatcher when it had employed no more than five in the previous four years. And this happened as government officials and lawmakers said they were turning over every rock to save money in a budget crisis.
"There was a lot of turmoil" about Pratt's move, said Cheryl Nagle, a State Capitol Police officer who retired late last year. "A lot of people got upset."

Salaries make up the lion's share of state and local budgets. The state, for example, has more than 290,000 employees on the payroll at state agencies, public schools, universities and community colleges. Denying access to salary histories makes it difficult to track growth in one of the most expensive areas of government.

Tracking changes

Some news organizations, including The News & Observer, have found ways to track salaries by requesting pay data for public employees year after year. That way, pay and position changes can be tracked over time. That's how The N&O could see what happened with Pratt.

Such tracking has helped uncover controversial salary growth at many institutions, particularly UNC system schools. In October, The News & Observer reported that percentage-wise, the fastest-growing segment of The N.C. School of Science and Mathematics' budgets over the past five years was administrative costs, including salaries.

The salary of Chancellor Gerald Boarman, who is leaving in July to lead an elite private school in Maryland, had grown 32 percent during that period, from $185,028 in 2004 to $245,000 in 2009.

Also last year, the New Hanover Alcoholic Beverage Control Board initially declined to provide the actual compensation for its staff in response to a request from The Star-News of Wilmington. Eventually the newspaper received the information, and it triggered an avalanche of criticism about the way the state and local boards manage liquor sales.

The New Hanover board's top two administrators, Billy Williams and his son Bradley, were compensated a combined $390,000 last year. The county later released the Williams' pay histories, which showed their compensation had risen by 50 percent in four years. The revelations caused all three members of the county's alcohol board to resign.

Calling it 'current'

Public officials continue to use the "current" provision within the personnel law to deny salary information critical to the public's understanding of how government works. Consider this chapter of the long-running investigation into perks obtained by former Gov. Mike Easley and his family:

N.C. State Provost Larry Nielsen stepped down in May, amid scrutiny over his role in hiring Easley's wife in 2005, and in giving her an 88 percent pay raise three years later. Nielsen would take a six-month sabbatical before returning to the faculty, but NCSU officials declined to say what his pay would be during that period. It was not "current" compensation because the sabbatical hadn't begun.

Eventually, NCSU released the terms of his transition back to the faculty. They showed that he would make the same $298,700 provost's salary while on sabbatical, and then receive a series of salary step-downs over three years until he was making the equivalent salary of a senior faculty member.

The deal exceeded what was allowed under UNC system policies. It ultimately helped expose hundreds of thousands of dollars wasted during the past five years on UNC administrators who were supposed to return to faculty jobs but either retired, left for other positions or were forced out by UNC schools.
Even there, the UNC system and some schools initially withheld the names of those who had received these transition packages because they did not take place in the current fiscal year. After further requests from the N&O, UNC System President Erskine Bowles made them public by invoking what is known as the "integrity exemption," which allows personnel information to become public if an agency's reputation is at stake. The information helped persuade the UNC Board of Governors to revamp its policies to prevent future abuses.

Changing the personnel law to make employment histories public would seem to be a relatively simple change, given that representatives of interested parties offer little objection. But the last time the state legislature tried, in 2001, it got shot down before it could get out of committee.

A survey of lawmakers and interviews of legislative leaders by The News & Observer last month found some lawmakers who viewed the information as too risky for public consumption. But most said employment histories should be open because the employees serve the public and the public pays them. In interviews, they said they couldn't understand why the information wasn't already public.

"If it's already been a public record, it ought to be a public record," said Senate Majority Leader Martin Nesbitt, an Asheville Democrat.

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Student Is Accused of Stealing and Selling Valuable Historic Letters

By ALISON LEIGH COWAN

William John Scott is a freshman at Drew University. He studies political science. He plays defense on the lacrosse team. He describes himself on Facebook as a night person who likes to party.

But federal prosecutors say he is something else: a busy archives thief who stole famous letters written by a founder of the United Methodist Church and world leaders, including Abraham Lincoln and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek.

Mr. Scott pilfered the letters while working part time at the university archives, the prosecutors said. He sold some of them for thousands of dollars, and left others sitting in a dresser drawer, where F.B.I. agents found them after executing a search warrant of his dorm room on Saturday. (On Facebook, Mr. Scott says he likes to keep the room "not a complete mess.")

Mr. Scott was arrested on Sunday as the bus bringing his lacrosse team back from spring break rolled into Drew's campus in Madison, N.J.

"He looked utterly surprised, like we were," said Tyler Morse, a junior on the team who saw Mr. Scott escorted off the bus by the university's head of public safety, into the car of F.B.I. agents.

On Monday, he was still wearing a blue hoodie when he was led handcuffed into United States District Court in Newark for a bail hearing. He was charged with one count of knowingly stealing an object of cultural heritage from a museum. He faces as much as 10 years in prison, if convicted.

Looking down as he was brought into the courtroom of Magistrate Madeline Cox Arleo, he
twice replied, "Yes, ma'am," when asked if he understood his rights and if he had retained a
lawyer. The judge authorized an unsecured $50,000 bond, on the condition that he surrender
his passport and agree to be supervised by pretrial services while remaining in the custody of
his parents, who live in Longmeadow, Mass.

Drew University officials and students were shocked to learn that one of their own might be
behind the loss of some of the university's most prized possessions. Founded as a Methodist
seminary in 1867, Drew has many important papers that shed light on the origins of the
Methodist church and the Wesley brothers, who helped found it. It is also an official repository
for the United Methodist Church itself.

According to federal prosecutors, Mr. Scott got a job in the archives in late October and was
given a key to a storage room containing many documents considered too rare to share openly.
Typical letters from John and Charles Wesley, for instance, can fetch $5,000 to $12,000
apiece on the market, according to the complaint.

The university became suspicious, according to an account provided by prosecutors, after an
antiques dealer in England alerted officials in its library that he had been approached by
someone offering to sell him original letters from the Wesleys. Ten of the letters arrived on
March 3, via FedEx, according to the complaint, with two suffering some damage in transit.

Prosecutors said the unprofessional way the valuable documents were shipped did not sit well
with the dealer, who then consulted Drew officials, given their expertise and collection of
Wesleyana.

After a quick search of its archives, the university estimated that 21 to 23 of its Wesley letters
appeared to be missing and contacted the F.B.I. The missing lot included a valuable letter,
worth more than $5,000, from John Wesley to a friend and supporter, George Merryweather,
dated Dec. 20, 1766.

After combing through Mr. Scott's dorm room, federal agents discovered a file containing six
Wesley letters besides the ones that were sent to England. The file also contained roughly 11
other important and historical documents from the university archives, including letters from
five United States presidents: Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, William McKinley,
Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Dwight D. Eisenhower. The file also had letters belonging to
the university from Richard Nixon when he was vice president, Robert F. Kennedy and
Madame Chiang.

University officials had not been aware that the presidential letters were missing until the
search of the dorm room. But they were optimistic on Monday that they would ultimately
recover any lost items. "For Methodists, these are treasures and so we're hoping to get them back," said Christopher Anderson, the Methodist librarian at Drew.

Matthew Beck, an assistant United States attorney in Newark, said, "The investigation is ongoing."

Colin Moynihan and David Walter contributed reporting, and Jack Begg contributed research.
Mixed-gender dorm rooms are gaining acceptance

About 50 schools in the U.S., including a few Ivy League campuses and several in California, are allowing men and women to room together. Participation is still relatively low.

By Larry Gordon

March 15, 2010

They weren't looking to make a political statement or to be pioneers of gender liberation. Each just wanted a familiar, decent roommate rather than a stranger after their original roommates left to study abroad.

That's how Pitzer College sophomores Kayla Eland, female, and Lindon Pronto, male, began sharing a room this semester on Holden Hall's second floor. They are not a couple and neither is gay. They are just compatible roommates in a new, sometimes controversial, dormitory option known as gender-neutral housing that is gaining support at some colleges in California and across the nation.

Eland, a biology major who hopes to become a doctor, said that a roommate's personality and study habits are more important than gender. "This might not be right for everyone," she said of sharing the small, cinder block-walled room with a man. "But I think it's important to have the right to choose where you want to live, how you want to live and who you want to live with."

Pronto, an environmental studies major who works each summer as a forest firefighter, agreed. Apart from remembering to lower the toilet seat, he said, living with a woman friend is not much different from rooming with a man. "As far as I'm concerned, a roommate is a roommate," he said.

Although the number of participants remains small, gender-neutral housing has gained attention as the final step in the integration of student housing.

In the 1970s, many U.S. colleges moved from having only single-sex dormitories to providing coed residence halls, with male and female students typically housed on alternating floors or wings. Then came coed hallways and bathrooms, further shocking traditionalists. Now, some colleges allow undergraduates of opposite sexes to share a room.

Pitzer, which began its program in the fall of 2008, is among about 50 U.S. schools with the housing...
choice, according to Jeffrey Chang, who co-founded the National Student Genderblind Campaign in 2006 to encourage gender-mixed rooms. Participating schools include UC Riverside, UC Berkeley, Stanford, Cornell, Dartmouth, Sarah Lawrence, Haverford, Wesleyan and the University of Michigan.

College officials say the movement began mainly as a way to accommodate gay, bisexual and transgender students who may feel more comfortable living with a member of the opposite sex. Most schools say they discourage couples from participating, citing emotional and logistical problems of breakups. Officials say most heterosexuals in the programs are platonic friends.

"College students are adults," said Chang, who is gay and is now a law student at Rutgers University in New Jersey. "They have every single right to choose the person they feel most comfortable living with."

He estimates that at schools where the option exists, only 1% to 3% of students living on campus choose a roommate of the opposite sex.

Officials at the Assn. of College & University Housing Officers - International say the trend has accelerated, but they don't expect most schools to adopt it. Experts note that most students prefer a same-sex roommate, and some colleges are reluctant to antagonize parents, legislators and donors who view the option as immoral or even dangerous.

Pepperdine University in Malibu, which is affiliated with the Churches of Christ, maintains separate dorm wings and apartments for men and women. Asked whether it would consider going gender neutral, Sue Gamboa, a housing department office manager, said: "Not in the wildest dream would Pepperdine move in that direction."

Harvey Mudd College, next to Pitzer in the Claremont Colleges, began gender-neutral housing last fall mainly as an option for gay and transgender students, said Guy Gerbick, dean of residential life. Seven students joined; among them are a man and two women, all straight, who share a triple room.

Parents cannot veto such a decision at Harvey Mudd, but Gerbick asks students to discuss it with their families ahead of time. He also asks applicants whether they are romantically involved; all of this year's participants said no. But if they were, the school could not forbid them from rooming together.

"If we are going into a post-gender world, then the regulation of private behavior is just not practical," he said.

Several years ago, an earlier proposal for gender-neutral housing was killed at Harvey Mudd by skeptical administrators and older, more conservative trustees, Gerbick recalled. More recently, 74% of Harvey Mudd students voted in a survey to allow the option and, to Gerbick's satisfaction, a new administration agreed.

UC Berkeley senior Rose DeLeon-Foote, who has a male roommate, laughed at fears that gender-neutral housing might promote promiscuity. In fact, she said, the opposite is true when roommates see each other "all gnarly in the morning."

"It's not sexual, it's just not," said DeLeon-Foote, 19, of Sacramento.

Many schools restrict the option to upperclassmen, to certain floors or to residence halls with gay
themes. Pitzer, which has about a dozen students participating this year, avoids such limits out of concern that they may marginalize students, said Chris Brunelle, director of residence life.

Pitzer housing applications ask whether students prefer a roommate to be woman, man, "other," or have no preference. Or students can request to live together, as Eland and Pronto did after losing their original roommates.

Their room, which shares a tiny bathroom with two men next door, has the usual collegiate trappings of beer bottles and political posters. The only unusual sight is women's clothes in one closet and men's in another.

The pair seem to have a warm brotherly-sisterly friendship and, while they try to be respectful, they say they are not inhibited about being in underwear or even nude while changing clothes in the room. They insist their living situation does not interfere with romantic relationships with other people. And although they have not been teased on campus, they face curious questions from relatives and friends.

"I definitely think it's generational," said Eland, 20, of Seattle. "For my grandparents, living with someone of the opposite sex, if he is not your serious boyfriend or husband or brother, would be very strange."

Pronto, 21, of Weimar, north of Sacramento, said his mother at first worried that he might be distracted by having a female roommate. And fellow firefighters at his "macho" summer barracks may joke about it, he said.

But at colleges, he said, "I think those old-fashioned ways of thinking are kind of dissipating. . . . Over the years, this division between men and women, which was so big, is slowly closing."

Eland's and Pronto's living arrangement won't last long.

Both will be studying overseas next fall, she in Spain, he in Costa Rica, and they are not sure where -- or with whom -- they will live when they return to school.

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