

Skull Base: From Enigma to Reality

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Introduction

Skull base surgery was tried out many thousands of years ago, if one would look at the trephinations in ancient mummies. After the era of Microscopic surgery, when multiple corridors were made to tackle different skull base locations, endoscopy gave a totally new perspective, hitherto unnoticed by the conventional skull base micro surgeons. Tumors in the skull base has almost been entirely taken over by the endoscopic surgeons, skull base approaches to vascular lesions still retain their significance even today, although most of these approaches could be replaced by endovascular approaches.

Robotic surgery, endoscopy and endovascular surgery may come to replace the extensive and elegant skull base approaches. I have had the pleasure of having Dr. Garnette who is a pioneer in robotic surgery as a close friend and getting amazed at the sheer possibilities robotics has to offer to Neurosurgery. However, Garnette and my friend Paulo Porto De Melo will agree with me on the fact that without an extensive knowledge of anatomy of these regions and experience in hands on courses in the lab, it would not be too wise to venture out into skull base with just the advancement in technical wizardry. I am sure, as long as people don't trust a Robot to fly their passenger jet, they are unlikely to trust a robot to do their brain surgery as well. And I seriously cannot imagine of any robot flying an A380. Unmanned drones are on the horizon, but reserved for military experiments and the like as of now although the scene may be different and our perspectives may be different after a hundred years.

Today skull base is a specialty which needs to be done with a team comprising of a Neurosurgeon, ENT surgeon, Maxillofacial surgeon and a Plastic surgeon with both microsurgery and endoscopic surgery as methods to reach difficult locations. There are many ways to skin a cat and anybody who thinks it can be skinned in only their way is living in a fool's paradise. Team work between sub specialties and respect towards different approaches and combining everything for the benefit of patients is what we must look at. One should be able to rise above self and pave the pathway for better outcome in this elegant branch of neurosurgery.



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