

Most people wouldn't give much credit to video games as the source of vocational inspiration, but urologist Benjamin Lee believes that it was this childhood activity that ultimately prepared him for his current career. "Growing up in the era of video games trained me to operate looking off a monitor while moving the controls with my hands. It became second nature to me," he remembers. "When I was young, I thought I would be a computer programmer, but I became interested in medicine when I started blending computer science and medicine in high school, when doing research at Bethesda Naval Medical Research Institute." Lee grew up outside of Washington D.C., where his father, a Taiwanese immigrant, worked as a research biochemist for the Food and Drug Administration. He remembers that his grandfather, a physician in Taiwan, always hoped that one of his descendants would follow in his footsteps. It was ultimately the second generation of children that finally realized this dream; Lee's sister and brother are a pediatrician and a podiatrist, respectively. "My grandfather died before we were accepted to medical school," Lee recalls. "But my dad used to say that Grandfather was looking down from heaven and smiling." Lee attended Cornell University as an undergraduate, and earned his medical degree from Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. He stayed there, honing his general and urologic surgical skills, for 10 years. It is Lee's successful blending of modern technology and medicine that allows his patients, who face such serious problems as prostate cancer, to breathe a little easier. As a specialist in endourology, Lee is able in many cases to perform groundbreaking and minimally invasive surgery, using methods such as robotics, laparoscopy and ureteroscopy. "Robotic prostate cancer surgery is the latest and fastest-growing development, and today, approximately 60 percent of all prostate cancer surgery in the U.S. is done by robotic surgery." Lee was drawn to his specialty by what he describes as its "continuity of care," in that it involves not only diagnosis of disorders but also their treatment. His job is to ensure that the human "plumbing" system functions properly. "If the tubes which drain urine from the kidney to the bladder become blocked, either because of a kidney stone, a tumor or scar tissue," it's the urologist's job to "unblock and improve the drainage." It is a specialty that Lee feels is able to constantly combine new technologies and innovations. For example, he regularly treats patients with



Inside Job

BENJAMIN R. LEE

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kidney cancer who, 10 years ago, would have needed the entire organ removed. With the use of robotic surgery, "we can cut the cancer out and save 50 to 75 percent of the kidney," he explains. "If anything happens to the other side, it's enough to keep them off of dialysis." Additionally, Lee notes that the Tulane Cancer Center offers free prostate screening; he often covers the clinic at University Hospital, providing urologic care for those without medical insurance. Lee was working as the Director of Laparoscopy at the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Medical Center in New York when Hurricane Katrina forced many New Orleans doctors to relocate temporarily to his hospital. "I heard about what was happening and wanted to come and join the team to help rebuild New Orleans," he says. "The people here are similar to those I saw in New York after the 9/11 attack. There is a resiliency and a welcoming spirit." Since arriving in New Orleans a year ago, he hasn't regretted his decision. Along with his career and his position on the editorial board of the Journal of Endourology, Lee finds plenty of time to enjoy the city with his wife and two children.