

Mann About Town

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A photograph of Dr. David B. Samadi, a middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing blue scrubs. He is standing in an operating room, holding a surgical instrument that is illuminated with a red light. The room is dimly lit, with several large, circular surgical lamps providing bright, warm light. In the background, there are shelves with various medical supplies and equipment. The overall atmosphere is professional and clinical.

DR. DAVID B. SAMADI
MT. SINAI'S STAR SURGEON



Dr. David B. Samadi

RoboDoc

by Aliza Davidovitz
photography by jillphotography.com

After Dr. David B. Samadi appeared on *Law & Order* this past June playing the role of a surgeon, he could say something that “Dr. McDreamy” of *Grey’s Anatomy* could never boast, and that is: “I AM a real doctor and I also played one on TV.” The only advantage is that the *Grey’s Anatomy* actor has the ladies running after him and Dr. Samadi, well, he is in hot pursuit by some very famous and powerful men.

Dr. David B. Samadi is a urologic surgeon. Simple enough? No, not simple at all. He is one of the very few urologic surgeons in the United States trained in oncology, open surgery, laparoscopic surgery and robotic surgery.

What’s robotic surgery you ask? We will get there. But before we do, did you know that more than 230,000 new cases of prostate cancer are diagnosed in the United States each year according to The American Cancer Society? It is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in men after skin cancer and it is the second leading cause of cancer death in men after lung cancer. It’s more hazardous to men than their mother-in-laws, because prostate cancer is a silent killer.

But Dr. Samadi has made it his life’s work to give voice to this disease—which has no symptoms—before it can speak for itself. With eloquence of tongue slightly tinged by a Persian accent that adds to his charm, Samadi uses every venue—including his weekly slot as a Fox News Medical correspondent and his platform as an international speaker—to urge men to

get tested. The PSA (prostate specific antigen) test is a simple blood test that only requires a few drops of blood. So, don’t be scared and do it! Over 90% of those who get treated in time get cured. But be forewarned, this is not just your grandfather’s problem. Getting tested at age 40 is not too soon.

With premature gray sprinkling the sides of his thick black hair, at age 44 Samadi is already the Vice Chairman of the Department of Urology and Chief of Robotics and Minimally Invasive Surgery at The Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City. Performing 15 surgeries a week with over 3,300 robotic laparoscopic prostate surgeries under his belt—well not exactly “his” belt—Samadi’s accomplishments must certainly be the envy of his senior confreres. His most recent famous patient to undergo robotic laparoscopic is radio host Curtis Sliwa.

Okay, so what is robotic surgery? And what is so special about Samadi if a robot does the surgery? Why didn’t we interview the robot instead? Well, because behind every great robot, is a great man—hopefully. The robot doesn’t make a move unless the doctor does. It is simulation at its finest. In addition, he has put his own special spin on the procedure which has him in demand across the globe both for treatment and to train other surgeons. It is called SMART Surgery—Samadi Modified Advanced Robotic Technique.

The \$2.6M robot itself is called da Vinci and the procedure is called a da Vinci Robotic Prostatectomy. The robot provides the surgeon with 3D visualization and allows him to perform a more precise

and minimally invasive prostate surgery procedure, which protects the patient’s delicate prostate nerves controlling bladder and sexual function. Thus, men need not fear losing their “masculinity”—and excuse me for saying—but they will be ready, willing, and able to drop their pants in more exciting places than Mt. Sinai Hospital after the operation.

What’s most impressive about the well-dressed, classy, 6’ 1” Dr. Samadi was nothing he said about himself. In fact, it was hard to get him to speak about himself at all. It is obvious that his work consumes him and animates him as well. His replies to almost any question I asked were punctuated with the need for men to get tested. He’s a proud man; he’s an ambitious man; he is a self-assured man. But if he has a big ego it certainly doesn’t manifest itself in arrogance. Finally a doctor who doesn’t think he’s God. And that is perhaps why all his patients do. For Samadi really doesn’t need to puff the wind into his own sails as one of his patients has literally done that for him. Olympic medalist Steve Benjamin changed the name of his racing sailboat from After Midnight to Robotic Oncology to show his deep appreciation to Dr. Samadi for saving his life. The testimonials on the doctor’s website from his past patients are not only supremely impressive but also heartwarming to read, especially in times when less and less people take pride in their professions and human kindness and compassion seem to be dispensable.

So here we have a successful handsome Jewish surgeon. Wow, sounds like good husband material. Well, sorry to break your hearts ladies but he’s taken. “I’m



fortunate to have a wife who is a superb mom and a great partner,” Samadi says of his wife of 11 years, Sahar, who like him is from Iran. But with only 24 hours in a day, there is a downside to being such a driven and successful doctor. “My family would like to see much more of me,” Samadi shares. Sahar’s father, Albert Danielpour, paid the ultimate price for being a successful, prominent Jew in Iran. He was executed by the Iranian government merely to serve as an example and to teach a lesson to Jews there.

As for Samadi, he, like many, fled after the 1979 Iranian Revolution which ushered in State promotion of Islam and the elimination of secularism. He found himself in odd circumstances growing up a Persian Jew in a Moslem country and attending a Catholic school. Although the pensive doctor says he never experienced anti-Semitism and speaks highly of the Iranian people themselves, when walking to synagogue neither he nor his family ever wore garb that betrayed their Jewish identity. It was an identity that his father drilled into him and his cousins

during their 45-minute drive to school every day teaching them Judaism on the go. Today Samadi feels that Judaism is much more than just ritual. “I practice my religion every time I raise a scalpel,” Samadi says. “Taking care of all peoples regardless of religion and using my God-given talent to help others is what is imprinted on me from my faith.”

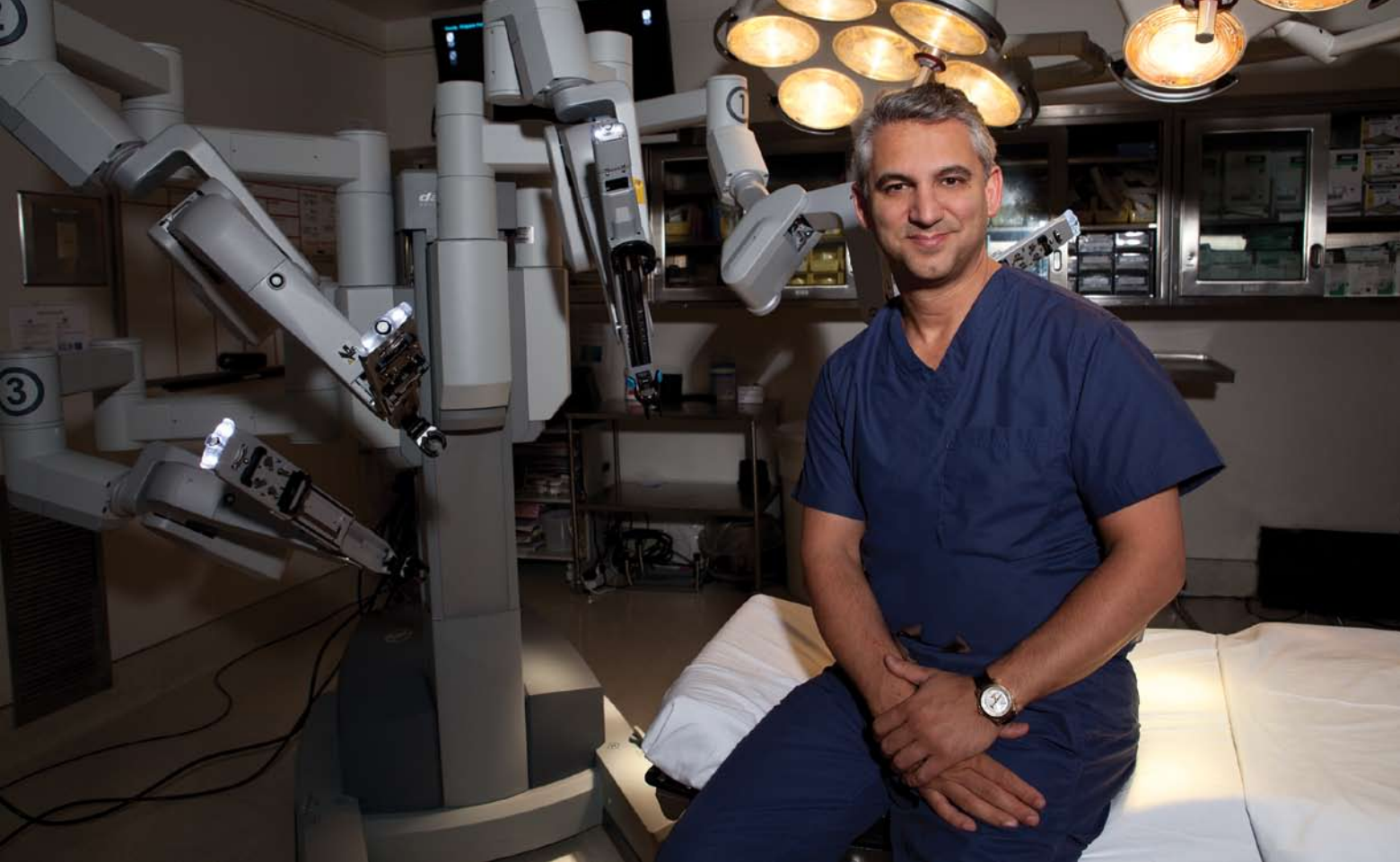
And though he may be doing God’s work, Samadi’s talent is primarily driven by his personality. “I have to be the best at everything I do.” It is no wonder that he was captain of his soccer team as a kid and has been competitive all his life. “You can’t help but succeed if failure is not an option.” Or maybe success is genetic in the Samadi family as he, his brother, his sister and all 20 cousins are doctors. To this day

he loves to study people’s success stories and learn from them. He points to President Barack Obama as a prime example of someone who can make it if “they believe in their mission and are driven by the ‘audacity of hope.’”

Samadi was rather audacious himself. At 15 and a half, he and his brother, on their own, left their tumultuous place of birth and made their way to Brussels and then London. Serving as a role model for his younger brother, Dan, Samadi had to grow up fast. His own father, who was Samadi’s role model, was in the radiology equipment business. Samadi senior always pushed his kids to do things they weren’t inclined to do to help them grow and push the boundaries of their capabilities. His father’s motto stayed with him: “There is nothing that stands before your hope.” Often accompanying his father on business, he would admire all the doctors he met in their scrubs, which he then called green pajamas. He was bit by the medicine bug and there was no antidote.

Samadi shares how American pop culture at the time and the popularity of Michael Jackson and his ilk made America seem like the place to be. So he and his brother “beat it” and left to America. He completed high school in Roslyn, NY and then attended the State University of New York at Stony Brook and earned his degree in biochemistry on a full scholarship. But his resume was just warming up. He then completed his post-graduate training in general surgery at Montefiore Medical Center and in urology at Albert Einstein School of Medicine and Montefiore Medi-

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cal Center. He went on to do an oncology fellowship in urology at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and a robotic radical prostatectomy fellowship at Henri Mondor Hospital Creteil in France. And the crown of his resume was meeting his wife in 2000 when she worked in health-care management at Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

But what probably makes Samadi a great doctor is that his biggest fear is that he himself is afraid to die, something his patients can surely relate to. "It is just so irreversible," he says. And going even deeper behind his macho veneer, it's surprising to hear from the good doctor that he wears his emotions on his sleeve. "There is plenty a day that you'll find me crying at work when I give a patient good news," he shares. "People would be very surprised to know I have a very soft side."

Despite his success, Dr. Samadi doesn't take all the credit for himself. He gives much of it to his team: "I learned early on if you push alone, you won't succeed." His knows his maxim well: "Individuals don't go to the Olympics alone; only teams make it." He considers his

medical teammates a second family, and surrounds himself with positive, energetic, can-do people.

Also, overflowing with much energy of his own, he is constantly on the go. He loves the rush that his life affords him. "It's a very exciting life that takes me from surgery to broadcast news to the Emmy Awards, and then the next day I meet people from different countries who I'd never meet if didn't do what I do."

A more recent trip took him to Israel, where he performed Israel's first ever "SMART" robotic prostate removal surgery at Rambam Hospital in Haifa. Rambam is known for its innovation and as a state-of-the-art facility. With great enthusiasm many of the surgeons watched live on a screen in the hospital auditorium as Samadi performed the procedure.

"I am very proud and privileged to be part of this groundbreaking news in Israel," Dr. Samadi told the Israeli press. The operation drew the interest of Shaul Mofaz, Israel's former Defense Minister and Yona Metzger, Israel's Chief Rabbi. Thank

goodness the Chief mohel took no part.

Samadi is proud that America offers the best medical care and medical innovation in the world, and he feels duty bound to export that excellence to other countries that need it. As such, with healthcare being such a looming issue, Samadi is not so sure that socialized medicine will keep America at the forefront. "I believe the president meant well," Samadi says, "but I don't believe that it will benefit the country and the state of medicine. The president should have consulted with more physicians to get a more comprehensive understanding."

Yes, Dr. David B. Samadi may be a RoboDoc, but he is also a passionate person and a full-fledged mensch. Nonetheless, here is a word of caution: A post-operative side-effect may be that one finds oneself singing, "My Hips Don't Lie", for a few weeks after surgery as Dr. Samadi and his A-team listen to Shakira on their collective iPod while they are busy saving lives.

McDreamy, you got nothing on him! 