

The Association of Otolaryngologists of India
West Bengal

p-ISSN: 2395-2393

e-ISSN: 2395-2407

www.bjohns.in

BJOHNs

Bengal Journal of Otolaryngology and Head Neck Surgery

Vol. 34 No. 2 August, 2026



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Bengal Journal of Otolaryngology and Head Neck Surgery

Official Publication of The Association of Otolaryngologists of India, West Bengal

Volume 34 No. 2 - August, 2026

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p-ISSN: 2395-2393

e-ISSN: 2395-2407

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Bengal Journal of Otolaryngology and Head Neck Surgery

(Incorporating and directly descended from State Journal of Otolaryngology and Otolaryngology, Calcutta)

Published by

The Association of Otolaryngologists of India, West Bengal
CMC House, 91B Chittaranjan Avenue,
Kolkata - 700073,
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India.

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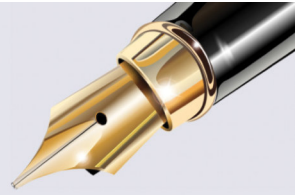
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From the Desk of the Editor



The medical landscape stands on the brink of a profound transformation, and nowhere is this evolution more vivid than within our own specialty. For decades, the structural anatomy of the head and neck has presented an unforgiving terrain for surgeons. Accessing deep-seated lesions of the oropharynx historically demanded a daunting trade-off, often forcing us to execute highly morbid, open procedures like mandibulotomy just to achieve adequate visualization. These classic approaches, while oncologically sound, frequently left patients facing prolonged intensive care stays, permanent swallowing disorders, and severe cosmetic changes. Today, however, the dawn of Transoral Robotic Surgery, or TORS, has completely rewritten this narrative, turning what used to be aggressive, open operations into elegant, ultra-precise, minimally invasive interventions.

This shift represents much more than a simple upgrade in our surgical tools; it is a fundamental leap beyond our own human and anatomical limitations. By utilizing specialized single-port robotic systems, we can now manoeuvre effortlessly through natural orifices, entering the mouth with tools that possess agility far superior to human hands. Where a surgeon's fingers might struggle with a lack of space, multi-jointed robotic instruments offer seven full degrees of freedom, bending around anatomical corners with ease. When coupled with software that filters out natural microscopic hand tremors and scales down our movements, the robot provides a level of microscopic accuracy that was previously unimaginable. Furthermore, high-definition three-dimensional magnification brings the intricate tissue planes of the throat into stunningly sharp focus, allowing for meticulous, millimetre-by-millimetre dissection.

While TORS has established its dominion in the soft tissues of the pharynx, this revolution is also breaking ground in the rigid, microscopic realms of otology and skull base surgery. Here, the challenge shifts from navigating deep pathways to managing unyielding bone and millimetric tolerances. In otology, robotic assistance is stepping in to perform delicate tasks like cochlear implant electrode insertion, where steady, automated advancement minimizes trauma to the fragile inner ear structures. Similarly, in anterior and lateral skull base surgeries, micro-robotic arms and navigated drill systems assist us in carving pathways around critical neurovascular bundles. By maintaining steady trajectories that human muscles cannot sustain over long hours, these systems expand our reach into deep cranial corridors, drastically reducing the risk of catastrophic vascular or nerve injury.

The tangible benefits of this collective technological leap are felt most profoundly by our patients, particularly those navigating the rising tide of human papillomavirus-related oropharyngeal cancers or complex cranial base pathologies. By eliminating the need for extensive external incisions, robotic surgery preserves critical anatomical structures, leading to significantly shorter hospitalizations and a

much faster return to a normal quality of life. Yet, as we look to the horizon, the true potential of this technology is expanding even further through its convergence with artificial intelligence. As we see computational systems mature, AI is stepping into the operating theatre as an intraoperative co-pilot. In the near future, real-time computer vision will seamlessly overlay anatomical roadmaps onto our surgical screens, alerting us to hidden internal carotid arteries or facial nerves, while advanced tissue tracking will help us clearly differentiate malignant tumor margins from healthy tissue.

Despite these incredible strides, our community currently sits in a critical transitional phase that requires careful navigation. The unique constraints of otolaryngology mean we must operate inside remarkably narrow spaces, which makes the adaptation of bulkier robotic systems quite challenging. Furthermore, the high financial costs of acquiring and maintaining this equipment, combined with steep learning curves for training clinicians, remain significant hurdles to widespread adoption across our regional healthcare centres. To usher in this future responsibly, we must demand robust validation, multicentre clinical research, and a commitment to structured training protocols. By maintaining a strict human-in-the-loop framework where clinical judgment always reigns supreme, we can ensure that these automated advancements serve as a trusted ally. Ultimately, surgical robotics is not here to replace the touch of the surgeon, but to elevate our capabilities, safeguard our patients, and refine the art and science of medicine.



Dr Saumitra Kumar

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