

# Dr. Daniel Murariu brings unique medical procedures to hawai'i



Daniel Murariu, M.D.



Dr. Murariu is a leading expert in the use of robotics for reconstructive surgery.



From left: Dr. Murariu with Dr. Carly Wachi, Dr. Dylan Goto, and Dr. Krishna Rao after the first robotic VRAM flap for vaginal and perineal reconstruction at Kuakini Health System.

It's always a benefit for Hawai'i's health when a doctor returns after training or working elsewhere. That's especially true when that doctor brings unique skill sets back with them.

Daniel Murariu, M.D., is one of the top reconstructive surgeons in the nation. After his residency in general surgery at the University of Hawai'i, Dr. Murariu went to the Mainland to continue his education and eventually became director of microsurgery and lymphatic surgery at Allegheny Health Network in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He returned to Honolulu in 2022 to join Athena Clinic Plastic Surgery.

"I always wanted to come back at some point," he says. "So, when the right opportunity came up, I said, 'Let's do it.'"


Dr. Murariu is one of the few doctors who is considered an expert in DIEP (deep inferior epigastric perforator) flap reconstruction. It's a type of breast reconstruction that uses skin, fat, and blood vessels from the lower belly to rebuild the breast after a mastectomy. It spares the muscle and has fewer risks and complications than other flap surgeries.

"In breast reconstruction, we have implant-based options, but using the patient's own tissue is the gold standard in certain situations," says Dr. Murariu. "We reconnect the belly vessels to the chest wall vessels using a microscope and then reconstruct the breast using the belly fat instead of implants."

Until Dr. Murariu's arrival, "there wasn't anybody on the island offering DIEP on a regular basis," he says. "So patients either go to the Mainland for DIEP, receive no reconstruction, or use the back muscle latissimus and an implant, an option rarely used in most centers."

What makes Dr. Murariu's technique even more unique is his use of robotics. He says he's "part of about half dozen plastic surgeons in the U.S. performing robotic reconstruction surgery for perineal, head and neck, and breast reconstruction." A book he's editing on robotic techniques in plastic surgery is due out by early next year.

His robotics expertise has been a lifesaver for Eddie Okahara. The 80-year-old 'Aiea resident opted for surgery over radiation when his colon cancer reappeared. Krishna Rao, M.D., a colorectal surgeon, used a robotic surgery procedure to remove six inches from Okahara's colon, and Dr. Murariu used the same robot to reconstruct the area using muscle and skin from the abdomen. The procedure was first pioneered using the robot by Dr. Murariu, which helped Okahara's recovery go much smoother.

"It's different because he's working with computers," Okahara says. "He's not right over the person. He's operating in a separate area where he's got joysticks and stuff. But it's just like he's right in there working because of the robotics." 



Read about the HELP repayment program at the John A. Burns School of Medicine on [islandscene.com/more](https://www.islandscene.com/more).

**words** David Frickman

**photos** courtesy of Athena Clinic