

Combination therapy spares some head and neck patients from surgery

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Giving patients with head and neck cancer a combination of chemotherapy and radiation therapy controls the cancer and allows many patients to avoid additional surgery to the neck, according to a study presented at the plenary session today at the Multidisciplinary Head and Neck Cancer Symposium in Rancho Mirage, Calif., co-sponsored by the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology, the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the American Head and Neck Society.

"Our goal is to cure the cancer as effectively as we can while using as few treatments as possible," said Ramesh Rengan, M.D., Ph.D., lead author of the study and an assistant professor at University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. "This study is so exciting because it demonstrates that giving patients with head and neck cancer a non-invasive regimen of cisplatin-based chemotherapy and radiation therapy effectively treats many advanced head and neck cancers, meaning some patients can safely avoid an invasive surgery."

A standard of care for patients with advanced head and neck cancer is chemotherapy and radiation followed by surgery to the neck. This study, performed at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, instead focused on treating the patients with chemotherapy and radiation and then measuring the patients' response to the therapy to see if they still needed the follow-up neck surgery. Eighty percent of the patients with advanced head and neck cancer who participated in this study had a complete response to chemoradiation alone with elimination of any detectable disease in the neck. Of these patients who achieved eradication of neck disease, 85 percent were able to maintain long-term remission without the need for additional invasive neck surgery.

Source: American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology

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