

Laser surgery — the optimal technique for partial laryngectomies

David Collins had an earache. It was not an ailment that the 66-year-old was accustomed to having. His doctor treated it, but it didn't go away. Then David's voice started to get gravelly, so he decided to see an otolaryngologist (ear, nose, and throat specialist).

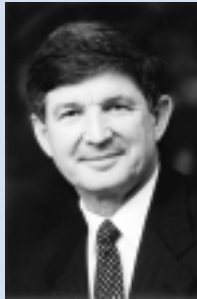
"The specialist didn't like what he saw," David recalls. "He did a biopsy and found I had cancer of the vocal cords and voice box! He wanted to start radiation then and there, so I did. I had daily radiation for six weeks after that."

But after all the radiation, David could barely speak and had trouble with swallowing. Several weeks later, his otolaryngologist did another biopsy, revealing that the cancer was still there.

"They couldn't give me any more radiation," David says. "The next step was to remove my vocal cords and voice box. That wasn't a good option in my mind, so my doctor referred me to UW Medical Center to see **Dr.**

Ernest Weymuller.

"I really didn't want to lose my voice. Dr. Weymuller told me that they could do a partial laryngectomy so I wouldn't lose all of my voice box," David recalls.



Dr. Ernest Weymuller

Standard partial laryngectomies performed after radiation would predispose David to poor swallowing function and aspiration of food (food going into the lungs), Dr. Weymuller, UW professor and chairman of otolaryngology - head and neck surgery, told him. Research has demonstrated that swallowing function is critical to quality of life. David's swallowing would be better if they removed the entire voice box.

But, a few days later, Dr. Weymuller called David to tell him about **Dr. Greg Farwell**, UW assistant professor in otolaryngology-head and neck surgery. Farwell had just returned from Germany,



David Collins smiles because he can speak, swallow, and is cancer-free, thanks to leading-edge laser surgery now being used at UW Medical Center.

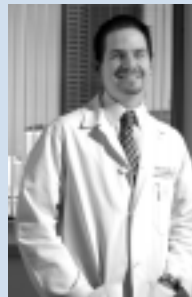
where he had received special training in advanced laser surgery.

"Endoscopic laser surgery is a new technique in the United States for partial laryngectomies, but one that has been used in Europe for years," says Dr. Farwell. "It was developed to maintain function while removing cancer."

David was definitely interested.

"I prefer to do this surgery before radiation," Dr. Farwell says, "because radiation changes the tissue. Since the body only tolerates radiation once, I can save radiation in case of a recurrence."

But, on Nov. 20, 2001, Dr. Farwell performed the six-hour surgery on David's voicebox. He was the first patient in the Northwest to receive this specialized technique for a partial laryngectomy – and has recovered well. His swallowing is normal and his speech is improved.



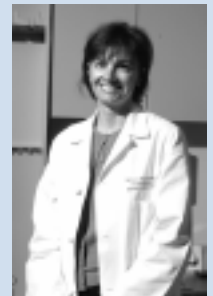
Dr. Greg Farwell

Dr. Farwell was able to leave more normal tissue as compared to open surgery and there are no scars.

David's voice is quiet and sounds hoarse, but at least he can speak.

"People need to quit accepting drastic surgery," David says. "There has to be something better. There was for me."

Dr. Nicole Maronian, UW assistant professor in otolaryngology-head and neck surgery, is also trained in this specialized technique. Laser surgery is also used for tongue and larynx (voice box) cancers as well as small, multiple pre-cancerous areas.



Dr. Nicole Maronian

For more information about laser surgery, or head and neck cancer, please call the Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery Center at 206-598-4022 or on the Web at www.uwmedicalcenter.org.