

# Treating cancer to save a kiss.



Think about the best parts of your average day...enjoying a meal with a friend, whistling to a tune on the radio, kissing someone who's special to you.

Ever stop to wonder what it would be like not to be able to do these things? Of course not, they're automatic. But for 20,000 people who are diagnosed with mouth or throat cancer every year, these simple pleasures and necessary processes quickly become more precious than life itself.

## Dynamic and complex

Of all the regions in the human body, the mouth and throat are responsible for the most diverse range of functions. Many of these functions are vital to an individual's socialization, daily pleasures, and basic survival.

Speaking, chewing, swallowing, smiling, and kissing are a few of the simple and automatic functions that are served by this region, yet are highly coordinated and dynamic activities.

For many people with cancer of the mouth or throat, a tumor has to be

surgically removed, requiring the removal of adjoining muscle tissue or bone structure as well—a frightening prospect for obvious reasons.

At UW Medical Center, a team of specialists devoted to this type of cancer, known as otolaryngologists (ear, nose, and throat), are able to recreate and reconstruct parts of the mouth, throat, and jaw with bone and tissue from other parts of the body once the tumor is removed. This surgery is called microvascular free tissue transfer.

## An art form

Using this process, surgeons restore function to the mouth and throat that is both physically and cosmetically important. But it's imperative that the nerves in these restored features remain intact, that the tongue and the floor of the mouth remain mobile, and that the

pharynx retains sensation and its proper shape for effective swallowing.

"Microvascular free tissue transfers afford more creative and sophisticated reconstruction, ultimately providing better solutions to complex functions not previously available," says **Dr. Neal Futran**, UW associate professor and director of our head and neck service.

## What causes mouth cancer?

The most common factors related to mouth and throat cancers are smoking and excessive use of alcohol, according to Dr. Futran. The age of patients is anywhere from 35 to 75. Six times out of seven, patients will be male, though the incidence in women is growing and the median age of patients is getting younger.

"We're seeing too many people with this type of cancer," says Dr. Futran.

Of course the best medical advice is to avoid things that lead to cancer in the first place.

"Quit smoking, consume alcohol in moderation, and visit your doctor if you experience a change in your voice, experience throat pain, or have bleeding in your mouth or throat," Dr. Futran says.

If a lump appears in your neck, seek medical attention promptly. "As with any cancer, early detection saves lives," Dr. Futran says. "Don't wait out of fear or denial. This type of tumor doesn't have to mean the end of your life. We have the tools to treat it and maintain a positive quality of life."

For more information about head and neck cancer surgery, or to schedule an appointment, please call the Otolaryngology—Head & Neck Surgery Clinic at 206-598-4022.

You can learn more on the Web at [www.uwmedicalcenter.org](http://www.uwmedicalcenter.org), click Medical Services, Specialty Care, and the link for Ear, Nose and Throat Care.



Dr. Neal Futran