

Personalized, Coordinated Care for Head and Neck Cancer



The UCLA Head and Neck Cancer Program provides comprehensive, personalized care for benign and malignant tumors of the head and neck — tumors arising within the oral cavity, larynx, pharynx, salivary glands, thyroid, nose and sinuses.

UCLA is one of the nation's most active head and neck cancer treatment centers. The head and neck consultation clinic sees more than 50,000 patient visits each year, many of which are for the care of benign and malignant problems. The range and experience of the head and neck specialists allows us to offer the most comprehensive and advanced evaluations and treatments. Our specialists are highly experienced in the early diagnosis and accurate staging of head and neck cancers — from common types to extremely rare ones — and are dedicated to providing outstanding medical care that preserves speech, swallowing, hearing and facial appearance.

Team treatment for more efficient care

Developing the most effective treatment plan for head and neck cancers involves input from a variety of specialists. In order to optimize their consultations, patients meet with as many members of our multidisciplinary team as possible during a single visit.

Giving patients the most options

“The goal of the newly reorganized Head and Neck Cancer Program at UCLA is to provide the highest-quality care while providing the best possible patient experience,” says Maie St. John, MD, PhD, co-director of the program.

“On their first visit, patients can be seen by an expert team, including those who will assist them with quality-of-life issues,” says Elliot Abemayor, MD, PhD, co-director of the program. “Each patient’s initial visit is used to identify the best therapies available for them. We want to give patients options, and allow them to make choices after they’ve been informed.”

Treatment options at the UCLA Head and Neck Cancer Program extend beyond current standards of treatment. Our nationally recognized research program is pioneering new ways to treat and monitor head and neck cancers. Ongoing research initiatives available to patients include methods to improve tumor margin delineation and the use of polymer drug delivery systems to ensure that medications reach only the intended target and with controlled release to minimize side effects.

This allows us to formulate and implement a specific, multidisciplinary treatment plan for each patient. Our head and neck cancer surgeons work in consultation with medical oncologists, radiation oncologists, ophthalmologists, maxillofacial experts, psychologists, anesthesiologists, pathologists, radiologists, speech and swallowing experts, nurses and nutrition management specialists. We utilize the most advanced CT, MR and radiation therapy equipment available.

Program faculty and staff provide treatment as well as consultative services. Referring physicians receive detailed written reports on clinical findings and recommendations. Our patient coordinator is available to guide and support patients through the healthcare system, collecting medical records, coordinating appointments and answering questions so patients can concentrate on their recovery.

Specialized centers of care

The Head and Neck Cancer Program is a national leader in several practice areas, including partial laryngeal surgery and mandible-sparing procedures for oral cavity tumors. Other specialized services include a Skull-base Tumor Program, which offers endoscopic and minimally invasive surgery to patients with benign or malignant tumors, as well as a Trans-oral Surgical Team that uses state-of-the-art lasers and robotics to minimize disruption of vital organ function. The Head and Neck Wellness Clinic helps patients deal with the physical and psychological changes associated with cancer, offering both traditional and alternative treatments.

The Swallowing Disorders Program is a unique program dedicated to maintaining and improving speech and swallowing during and after therapy, and includes a swallowing function laboratory.

Specialists in dental oncology and prosthodontics are experienced in placing implants and can provide complete oral and dental examinations for patients who need dental care before and after treatment.

State-of-the-art surgical technology

Recent advances in the treatment of head and neck cancers include minimally invasive surgical options and robotically assisted surgery, sophisticated imaging technologies and increasingly precise radiotherapies. Such treatments offer the safest, most accurate and effective care possible. These innovative technologies and approaches include:

- Transoral laser microsurgery (TLM) and transoral robotic surgery (TORS) to ensure improved access and complete resection of tumors without need for open surgery
- Advanced tissue transfer techniques to replace surgically removed tissue and maintain appearance and function
- Imaging techniques developed at UCLA that allow surgeons to better define tumor margins so each tumor is removed precisely and completely with minimal damage to surrounding tissues
- Genetic tumor testing for personalized, targeted therapy

Participating Physicians

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Professor in Residence

Maie St. John, MD, PhD

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