

Children and adults squamous cell carcinoma of the oral tongue should be given the same therapy

By Victoria Stern

Pediatric patients with squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) of the oral tongue should receive the same treatment as adult patients, researchers suggest.

This recommendation is based on a report published in the July issue of Archives of Otolaryngology Head & Neck Surgery. The researchers found that after controlling for disease stage, tobacco exposure, and treatment modality, adult patients with SCC had the same outcomes as pediatric patients.

SCC of the head and neck comprises about 4% of all malignancies in the United States, however it is quite rare in the pediatric population. Approximately 1 in 1000 instances of head and neck SCC occur in patients 20 years or younger.

Although there is an extensive literature examining outcomes of SCC in young adults (<40 years), there is no literature on SCC in pediatric patients other than a few isolated case reports. These case reports present conflicting conclusions regarding disease severity and prognosis in pediatric patients.

“This inconsistency is most likely due to the fact that SCC is so rare in pediatric patients,” said lead investigator Dr. Ian Ganly, from Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

That is why Dr. Ganly and colleagues conducted a retrospective study comparing the outcomes of 10 pediatric patients, aged 15 to 20 years, and 40 adult patients treated for SCC of the oral tongue at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. Patients in both cohorts were matched in a 4 to 1 ratio for sex, smoking history, disease status, and treatment procedure.

The matched adult and pediatric groups experienced equivalent survival outcomes. The 5-year overall survival was 70% in the pediatric group and 64% in the adult group (hazard ratio 0.97,  $p=0.97$ ). The 5-year disease-specific survival was 80% in the pediatric group and 76% in the adult group (HR 1.11,  $p=0.90$ ). The 5-year recurrence-free survival was also similar: 70% in the pediatric group and 78% in the adult group (HR 1.50,  $p=0.54$ ).

These similar outcomes indicate that adults and children should be treated the same way, said Dr. Ganly. “Future studies on children should focus on possible genetic markers that may predispose them to this type of cancer,” he noted.

<http://archotol.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/136/7/697>

Arch Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg. 2010;136: 697-701.