

# Virus that brings cancer

Avoiding risk factors may help in many cases, but what can you do when the Big C is caused by a viral infection?



**M**ore than 9,000 people a year are diagnosed with head and neck cancer in the UK and, in some sites – such as tumours on the tonsils and tongue – the problem is becoming much more common, says consultant ear, nose and throat surgeon Stuart Winter.

While smoking and alcohol have, for a long time, been recognised as risks for cancer, an increasing number of cases are due to a virus – the human papilloma virus (HPV).

HPV is resulting in younger patients who have often never smoked being struck down by cancer, especially of the tonsils or back of the tongue.

Tumours in these sites can lead to pain and problems with speech or swallowing, but may also become apparent with a lump in the neck.

This lump may be painless and only noticed by accident while shaving or putting on make-up. This is why it is very important any neck lump is promptly and thoroughly investigated.

## Considering options

The investigations needed when you have a lump in the neck or difficulty swallowing or speaking, include a comprehensive examination, as well as possible biopsies, scans and prompt treatment planning.

Fortunately, many of these lumps are 'benign': that is non-cancerous. In

## MEET THE EXPERT



**Stuart Winter MD MB ChB BSc FRCS (ORL-HNS) is a consultant ear, nose and throat (ENT) surgeon based in Oxford**

Mr Winter has a specialist interest in tumours of the head and neck, both benign and malignant, swallowing problems and can offer advice on all aspects of ENT.

He undertook his undergraduate medical training at the University of Bristol and then surgical training in Oxford. He was a fellow at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, South Australia, for a year before taking up his consultant post in the UK.

During his training he undertook research in cancers and continues to be actively involved in research. He has held a number of national positions and is involved in teaching medical students and doctors in training.

these situations, appropriate treatment still needs to be planned.

However, when a cancer has been diagnosed, it is imperative you are seen by a specialist who can discuss the full range of treatment options available.

## Recovery looks good

Treatment may include surgery or chemoradiotherapy. Surgical treatments include laser and trans-oral robotic assisted procedures.

It is important the patient is aware of the full range of options as these can be crucial for obtaining a good outcome and long-term recovery. You may need support during treatment such as help with feeding and early rehabilitation.

The good news is that treated appropriately, the HPV-related tumours carry a good prognosis, and in the long term it is hoped the vaccination for the virus will reduce the risk further.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Visit **oxford-ent-doctor.co.uk**  
Email **kate.taylor@nuffieldhealth.com**