

I had the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Eisele, the Director of the Department of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery, specializing in the treatment of head and neck cancer and salivary gland disorders. Dr. Eisele joined Johns Hopkins after having served as Chairman of the Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery at the University of California, San Francisco, where he was the Irwin Mark Jacobs and Joan Klein Jacobs Endowed Chair in Head and Neck Cancer and directed the Head and Neck Oncology Program at the UCSF Comprehensive Cancer Center. Dr. Eisele was previously at Hopkins from 1988-2001.

Dr. Eisele stressed his department at Hopkins is arguably the best in the world. He is very excited they are expanding to the DC region and also the Greenspring area in order to reach more patients. Head, neck and salivary gland tumors make up for approximately 5% of all cancers. Because of the complexity of each individual and the throat and nose being involved, each treatment is completely customized.

The main takeaway from my meeting I wanted to share with our Board is the link they have found between HPV (human papilloma virus) and head and neck cancer. The Otolaryngology department at Hopkins has been a pioneer in the learning the unique features of HPV-associated head and neck cancers and finding new ways to treat them. They recently launched the Center for HPV – Related Head and Neck Cancer, bringing multidisciplinary experts together to provide care specifically focused on this disease. “HPV-related cancers used to make up only a fraction of the head and neck tumors we’d diagnose. Now it’s the predominant head and neck cancer that we see,” says Carole Fakhry, a JH otolaryngologist head and neck surgeon who specializes in this condition. Patients with these tumors were often missing the usual factors that doctors have been taught to expect, such as smoking and alcohol use. Unlike traditional head and neck cancers, HPV-related tumors respond more readily to treatment, including surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. Johns Hopkins will soon launch a treatment deescalation trial in which eligible patients are offered immunotherapy followed by surgery and nearly half the doses of chemotherapy and radiation delivered to those with traditional disease. Hopefully these patients will be able to avoid lifelong side effects caused by collateral damage from these treatments.

The bottom line Dr. Eisele wants us all to know- make sure your loved ones receive the HPV vaccine!

Katie Sunder, April, 2020