

Early detection critical in treating pediatric thyroid cancer

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Efforts to treat pediatric papillary thyroid cancer are greatly improved by detecting the disease as early as possible, making the patient's age the most important factor in determining a prognosis, according to new research published in the February 2008 issue of the journal *Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery*.

The study, authored by Italian researchers, evaluated 2,709 patients who underwent a total thyroidectomy to treat papillary thyroid carcinoma (PTC). Among the group's pediatric patients (younger than 18 years old), the cancer was observed to be much more aggressive than that in adult patients. However, despite the aggressive course of the disease, this did not influence the patient's survival rate, since cases of pediatric cancer have a better prognosis than that in adults. As a result, the authors concluded that age of detection is the single most important factor to consider when issuing a prognosis.

Thyroid cancer is the third most common tumor malignancy in children. It is one of the few cancers that has increased in incidence rates over the past several years, with an estimated 11 percent increase from 2006 to 2007. Papillary thyroid cancer occurs in cells that produce thyroid hormones containing iodine. This type, the most common form of thyroid cancer in children, grows very slowly.

The study also confirms that PTC is more prevalent in younger patients, compared with other age groups; these patients also had significantly larger tumors. However, the study's authors concluded that the size of

the tumor, which is considered a significant factor in determining prognosis in adult patients, does not play a significant role in a child's prognosis.

The study also suggests a longer period for follow-ups is in order to more accurately measure the success of treatment.

Source: American Academy of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery

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