

Oral surgeons to shine 'blue light' on cancer fight

May 27 2011, By Quinn Phillips

For the first time ever, a team of Canadian surgeons, which includes two University of Alberta researchers, is collaborating on a study into a technique for the better identification of oral cancer.

Hadi Seikaly and Jeffrey Harris, professors in the Department of Surgery in the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, are a part of a pan-Canadian Phase III clinical trial aimed at improving outcomes for patients undergoing surgery for oral squamous cell cancers—a cancer that recurs in 30 per cent of patients.

Surgeons at nine sites across the country will use fluorescence visualization, or “blue light,” provided by a hand-held light tool that previously used in other cancer treatments. Under the blue light, normal tissues generate a fluorescence, which is absent in tumour or pre-cancerous tissue. The goal of the study is to determine if the fluorescence visualization is able to spare normal healthy tissue from surgery while catching high-risk, pre-cancerous tissues.

Harris says he expects the U of A surgeons will start using the blue light within six months, and is cautiously optimistic this could drastically improve patient care.

“I think that this is an interesting technique that shows promise,” said Harris, who got involved while on academic leave in Vancouver. “We look forward to the final study results to see if this technique will provide a significant contribution to cancer care.”

Seikaly adds, “This development is very exciting. We hope that it will be very successful and become the model for national co-operation in the field of cancer treatment.”

The five-year study is being funded by the Terry Fox Research Institute, a research investment of \$4.7 million.

“Our investment in this promising study is our response to a serious clinical concern expressed by head and neck [surgeons](#) across Canada,” said Victor Ling, president and scientific director of the institute. “It has the potential to change surgical practices for [cancer](#) of the mouth nationally and internationally.”

Provided by University of Alberta

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