

Certain head and neck cancer patients benefit from second round of treatment

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A new study has determined predictors that can better identify patients who will benefit from a potentially toxic second course of treatment, which offers a small but real chance of cure in select patients with head and neck cancer. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings could help guide treatment decisions for head and neck cancer patients.

Radiation is often used to treat patients with head and [neck cancer](#). If their cancer reappears, they have limited treatment choices: chemotherapy is not curative, and surgery can be curative but is often not possible. Chemotherapy and a second course of [radiation](#) have previously been shown to be another option. Joseph Salama, MD, formerly of the University of Chicago, and his colleagues conducted an analysis of prior studies to determine how patients tolerate this second round of treatment and which patients benefit the most from it.

The investigators analyzed data from 166 patients with head and neck cancer who received a first round of radiation followed by a second round plus chemotherapy because their cancer recurred or they developed a new [tumor](#). The second course of treatment could cure approximately 25 percent of patients at two years, but it was quite toxic. (Some patients lost the ability to speak or swallow. In addition, approximately 20 percent of patients died from treatment-related complications.)

Certain patients benefited from the treatment over others. Those who

were cancer-free for a longer period of time, did not have chemotherapy with their first course of radiation, were treated with a higher dose of radiation in the second round, and had surgery prior to the second course of radiation were more likely to be cured at two years than those who had none or only one of these features. "These can help [doctors](#) determine which patients are best suited for a second course of radiation with chemotherapy for head and neck cancer," said Dr. Salama.

The authors concluded that for patients with recurrent [head and neck cancer](#) in a previously irradiated area, concomitant [chemotherapy](#) with reirradiation is a treatment option that offers a small but real chance of cure in select patients; however, due to the risk of severe toxicity, the treatment should be limited to investigational studies and experienced medical centers.

Provided by Wiley

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