New Approach To Thyroid Surgery Eliminates Scar

PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- As the rate of thyroid cancer continues to climb, doctors are urging patients to be more cautious about thyroid nodules, a common disorder that is responsible for a small but growing number of thyroid cancer cases. Until recently, the only way to remove nodules and rule out cancer was through surgery that required a five centimeter incision across the front of the neck. The procedure, and the large scar that resulted, was a deterrent for many patients. Today however, a new option exists that allows surgeons to access the neck through the armpit, allowing for a biopsy of tissue with no visible scar.

"We now have a minimally invasive way of determining if a thyroid nodule is cancerous," said Jose Dutra, M.D., head and neck surgical oncologist and director of the Thyroid Surgical Clinic at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. "If we can identify cancerous cells earlier we increase the chance of removing the cancer before it spreads." The procedure, transaxillary robotic thyroid surgery, utilizes 3D cameras and specially designed robotic arms to create a small incision within the armpit, the mechanical arms allowing the surgeon to operate remotely in removing suspicious nodules.

"The underarm area has fewer nerve endings than the anterior neck area, so there's less pain, no scarring on the neck, and with good care, the incision will heal faster," said Dutra, who is also an associate professor at the department of otolaryngology/head and neck surgery at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. This summer, Socorro Delaluz became one of the first patients at Northwestern Memorial to undergo transaxillary thyroid robotic surgery. The mother of two was impressed to have the option that left no visible scar and the quick recovery associated with the technique.

"I didn't want to be reminded constantly, every morning when I get dressed that I had a scar across my neck. I would have to explain to everyone what happened all the time," expressed Delaluz. Another benefit of the minimally invasive approach is that the precision of the robot allows physicians to remove all of the potentially cancerous tissue while sparing more of the structure surrounding the gland.

Thyroid nodules are six-times more common in women than men and can be difficult to diagnose because they often do not present signs or symptoms. Most nodules are small and are often found incidentally during a routine physical or imaging for an unrelated condition. Conditions that can cause one or more nodules to develop in the thyroid gland range from overgrowth of normal thyroid tissue, tumors, a cyst, inflammation and goiters.

While the new technology has great advantages, Dutra stresses this option is not

the best for all patients and not all tumors can be removed with this approach.

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