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Ten Minutes That Could Save Your Life

Oral, Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Week, May 8-14, 2011

Alexandria, VA — The American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS), is urging Americans to get screened for cancer during the 14th annual Oral, Head & Neck Cancer Awareness Week (OHANCAW), being held nationwide May 8-14, 2011.

Oral cancer is cancer that arises in the head or neck region, including the nasal cavity, sinuses, lips, mouth, thyroid glands, salivary glands, throat or larynx (voice box). According to the American Cancer Society, it is the sixth most common form of cancer in the United States, with 50,000 cases diagnosed annually and over 12,000 deaths. However, there is hope; if diagnosed early, these cancers can be more easily treated without significant complications, and the chances of survival greatly increase.

“When oral, head and neck cancers are diagnosed early, these potentially deadly diseases can be more easily treated without significant complications, and the chances of survival increase,” said Jatin P. Shah, M.D., PhD, a world leader in head and neck cancer surgery who is Professor of Surgery at Weill Medical College of Cornell University, Chief of the Head and Neck Service at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and a member of the HNCA Board. “Many Americans do not recognize the symptoms of these cancers, which underscores the importance of everyone getting screened properly, not just those at high risk such as tobacco and alcohol users.”

Every adult should get tested. Tobacco and alcohol users traditionally have been considered the populations at greatest risk for these cancers. However, oral cancer cases are on the rise in younger adults who do not smoke, and recent research indicates this development is due partly to the increase of the human papillomavirus (HPV) virus, a cancer-causing infection that can be transmitted by oral sex. HPV-related oral cancers are more difficult to detect because these cancers usually occur on the back of the tongue or on the tonsils, providing even more reason to get screened regularly.

What are the potential warning signs of oral cancers?

The signs and symptoms of oral cancer often go unnoticed. However, there are a few visible signs associated with these cancers that require immediate attention, including:

- **Red or white patches in the mouth that last more than two weeks**
- **Change in voice or hoarseness that lasts more than two weeks**
- **Sore throat that does not subside**
- **Pain or swelling in the mouth or neck that does not subside**
- **Lump in the neck**
- **Ear pain**
- **Difficulty speaking or swallowing**
- **Difficulty breathing**

Oral, Head & Neck Cancer Awareness Week (OHANCAW), coordinated by the Head and Neck Cancer Alliance, is a week annually dedicated to educating the public about these potentially life-threatening but highly treatable cancers, and to promoting prevention, screening and early detection.

Given the great demand for head and neck cancer screening opportunities and to honor the tradition of holding screenings in April, HNCA is excited to extend its screening promotions from April through May, 2011. Although the climax of the promotions will be held during the 2011 OHANCAW, May 8-14, HNCA is encouraging all supporters to pick a week during April or May that works best for their group to host a free screening event. For the past four years, Bristol-Myers Squibb and Lilly have provided funding for the free screenings as part of the companies' support of OHANCAW. For more information, please visit the OHANCAW website at www.OHANCAW.com and the AAO-HNS website at <http://www.entnet.org/AboutUs/publicCampaigns.cfm>.

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About the AAO-HNS

The American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery (www.entnet.org), one of the oldest medical associations in the nation, represents nearly 12,000 physicians and allied health professionals who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the ears, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck. The Academy serves its members by facilitating the advancement of the science and art of medicine related to otolaryngology and by representing the specialty in governmental and socioeconomic issues. The organization's vision: "Empowering otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons to deliver the best patient care."