Study Shows Lung Cancer Patients Resume Preoperative Activity Levels; First Steps in Telemedicine

Michal Hubka, MD, has long wondered how lung cancer surgery affects patients’ long-term physical activity levels, and whether there’s a way to craft postoperative interventions that better promote physical activity. He recently completed a study that starts answering those questions, by showing that many patients get back to preoperative levels of activity within three and a half years of lung resection.

The research builds on a study that Dr. Hubka launched in 2015 by equipping 62 lung cancer patients in their 60s, 70s and 80s with activity monitors. The patients wore the monitors for a period spanning 30 days before lung resection through 30 days following their procedure.

Published in *Annals of Thoracic Surgery*, the study showed that higher preoperative activity levels were associated with higher postoperative activity levels, irrespective of age, operative approach, resection extent, and other factors.

The follow-up study began in 2019, when Dr. Hubka asked 21 members of the group to wear an activity monitor for another week. This revealed the patients — despite the aging process, their history of lung cancer and surgery, and other potential medical problems — were back to preoperative activity levels.

“Activity recovers to baseline levels over time, and the patients with higher activity levels reported a higher quality of life,” Dr. Hubka says.

The research marks progress toward determining the optimal number of steps thoracic surgery patients should take postoperatively.

“Someday, we hope to leverage smart technology and targeted ambulation goals for patients recovering both in the hospital and at home. It would also allow us to monitor patients remotely and decrease the burden of phone calls for our nurses. This form of telemedicine is on our doorstep and will be an important adjunct to returning out patients to health and happiness,” Dr. Hubka says.

New Minimally Invasive Solution for Weight Loss

Virginia Mason’s Weight Loss Center recently became the Pacific Northwest’s only center offering AspireAssist, an innovative device that helps patients reduce calorie intake and lose weight without invasive surgery.

The device allows patients to remove approximately 30% of each meal through a PEG-like tube that is endoscopically inserted into their abdomen. The food is removed before the body can absorb the calories. The device is FDA-approved for adults with a BMI between 35 and 55, and supports patients in eating more slowly and deliberately.

“Patients can still eat what they’re accustomed to, they just need to chew really well to allow the device to work properly,” says Michael Larsen, MD.

Virginia Mason supports patients via in-person follow-ups and virtual sessions with a dietitian. A recent study demonstrated that people using AspireAssist lose 19% of their body weight on average (plus or minus 8%). The procedure takes less time, is less invasive and has fewer complications than bariatric surgery. Another benefit of AspireAssist: it can be removed at any time.

“Bariatric surgery may still be the best option for some patients,” Dr. Larsen says, “but AspireAssist can be an effective alternative for patients who might feel reluctant to undergo a major and permanent operation.”
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- Minimally-Invasive Ventral Hernia Repair Accelerates Recovery
- Taking Value-Based Care to the Next Level

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Virginia Mason accepts all major insurance plans and always welcomes new patients. A primary care relationship is not required for referrals. For more info about insurance coverage, please visit VirginiaMason.org/Insurance.

Virginia Mason Awarded for Patient Satisfaction

Virginia Mason is honored to be a winner of the 2019 Guardian of Excellence Award, which is presented by Press Ganey Associates. Press Ganey uses surveys to assess patient satisfaction across the U.S.; the award is given to centers whose patient satisfaction ratings are in the top 5% for each reporting period during the course of one year. “Everyone at Virginia Mason strives to create a remarkable experience for every patient,” says Amy Tufano, administrative director, Patient Relations and Experience. “This recognition is a result of our commitment to always putting patients first.”

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