Virginia Mason a Leader in Evaluation and Treatment of Anal Cancer

Neil Wiegand, PA-C

Diagnoses of anal cancer have increased dramatically in the past 20 years. While it’s not clear whether this is due to improvement in screening measures, an increase in human papillomavirus (HPV) infections or other reasons, early detection of anal cancer is critical to long-term survival, particularly because anal cancer is asymptomatic in its early stages.

“Our hope is much as cervical pap smears have led to dramatic decreases in cervical cancer, anal pap smears, followed by high resolution anoscopy (HRA) when appropriate, can prevent anal cancer,” says Neil Wiegand, PA-C, who specializes in anal dysplasia/anal cancer screening and surveillance at Virginia Mason. For historical reference, 1940’s rates of cervical cancer prior to screening were 40 to 50 patients per 100,000 (since reduced to 6.8 per 100,000 in 2015). In comparison, today’s anal cancer rates for HIV positive men are 65 to 131 per 100,000.

“What’s most important is that anal pap smears be performed for patients in high risk groups,” says Neil. These include patients with a history of anal dysplasia or anal warts, patients with a history of receptive anal intercourse and over age 45, HIV positive men over age 30, and patients with high-grade cervical dysplasia or cervical cancer.

The most sensitive and specific test for anal cancer remains the digital anal rectal exam. When an abnormality is identified through an anal pap smear, patients should be referred for an HRA. Virginia Mason, which specializes in the evaluation and treatment of patients with anal dysplasia and anal cancer, has four trained providers on staff to perform HRAs.

For more information, contact: 206-341-0060 • VirginiaMason.org/Anal-Dysplasia

Virginia Mason Developing Breath Test to Diagnose Esophageal Cancer

Donald Low, MD

Virginia Mason, in conjunction with St. Mary’s Hospital Medical School in London, is seeking to develop a non-invasive test to detect esophageal cancer in its early stages. The test would be based on the unique signature of volatile organic compounds within exhaled breath.

“If you can identify people with esophageal cancer early, you can almost always cure them,” says Donald Low, MD, thoracic surgeon at Virginia Mason. “However, there are no current standards or routine screening procedures to detect esophageal cancer early.” By the time most patients present with symptoms related to tumor growth obstructing the esophagus, the disease is typically advanced.

The breath analysis will be validated in patients known to have esophageal cancer. The researchers will also analyze exhaled compounds longitudinally in response to treatment with chemotherapy and radiotherapy and after surgical resection.

“The ability to detect esophageal cancer with a breath test could be a real game changer,” says Dr. Low. The breath test would be used for populations most at risk for esophageal cancer, including males in their 50s, 60s and 70s, people with a long history of gastroesophageal reflux disease, and patients with certain types of symptoms.

This work is funded through a grant from the Salgi Esophageal Cancer Research Foundation. Virginia Mason was selected by Salgi because of its reputation for excellence in research and treatment of esophageal cancer.

The Esophageal Center of Excellence at Virginia Mason’s Digestive Disease Institute draws upon the expertise of world-renowned gastroenterologists and surgeons to achieve outcomes that are among the best in the world. For information or to refer patients with esophageal cancer, call Tori Souza at 206-341-0691.

For more information, contact: 206-223-6164 • VirginiaMason.org/Esophageal-Center
Virginia Mason has become the first medical center in the Pacific Northwest to earn designation as a Donor Care Network Center of Excellence by the National Kidney Registry. The Donor Care Network is comprised of transplant programs within the registry that have met rigorous standards and are committed to specific actions that support quality clinical outcomes and patient experiences.

Since 1988, a total of 2,797 kidney-only transplants have occurred at Virginia Mason, more than any other transplant center in Seattle during this period of time.

CONTINUING MEDICAL EDUCATION

The 7th Virginia Mason Update in Inflammatory Bowel Disease
Friday, March 22

11th Annual Topics in Primary Care
Friday, April 5

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