Loyola Otolaryngologists + New Technology = Success

Loyola University Health System (LUHS) otolaryngologists are among the first in the country to offer leading-edge services for patients with difficult-to-diagnose facial paralysis and to treat patients with vocal cord disorders utilizing an innovative technology.

Leading Edge Services for Facial Paralysis

Most facial paralysis cases are due to Bell's palsy, but symptoms that mimic this condition may be masking cancer or other serious illnesses, according to Sam Marzo, MD, associate professor, Departments of Otolaryngology and Neurological Surgery, Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine (Stritch), and medical director of Loyola University Health System's (LUHS) Hearing and Balance Center. "Eighty-five percent of patients with facial paralysis truly have Bell's palsy, while the remaining 15 percent actually may have a malignant or benign tumor of the facial nerve or other problems," said Dr. Marzo. He co-directs the facial paralysis program at LUHS with John Leonetti, MD, professor, Departments of Otolaryngology and Neurological Surgery, Stritch. Their expertise is based upon treating more than 5,000 patients with facial nerve disorders.

"The fact is we often see these patients too late," explained Dr. Leonetti, who also directs LUHS' Center for Cranial Base Surgery. "We are happy to consult with referring physicians who may be uncertain about the diagnosis of patients with facial paralysis.

"Last summer, we evaluated a patient previously diagnosed with Bell's palsy by another institution, but after testing, we learned she had a parotid tumor," said Dr. Leonetti. "We removed her entire facial nerve and then reconstructed it. The proceedure required an operation that spanned two days."

Patients benefit from an entire facial paralysis team focused on their care. That team includes Drs. Marzo and Leonetti and experts in neuroradiology, neurosurgery, ophthalmology, physical therapy, plastic surgery and radiotherapy. Based upon extensive experience, the specialists have created finely tuned diagnostic and treatment algorithms to arrive at the best possible care plan for each patient that includes a complete otolaryngological examination. Cranial nerve testing, facial nerve testing, hearing testing and MRI imaging are some of the diagnostics utilized.

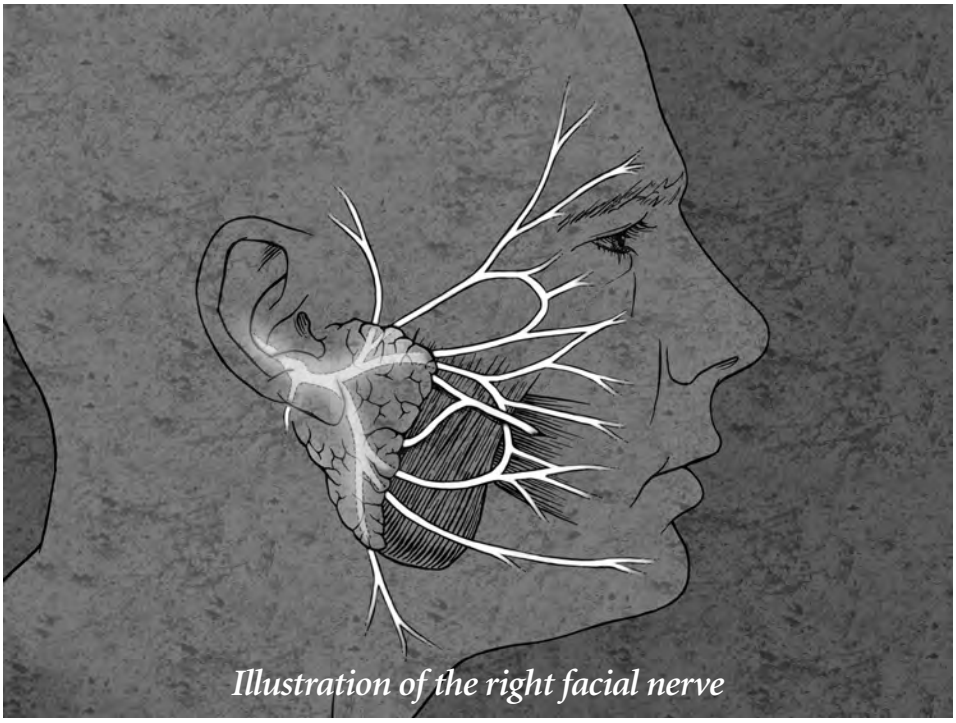

Illustration of the right facial nerve

Innovative Procedure for Vocal Cord Disorders

In the area of vocal cord disorders, LUHS specialists are among the first in the country to use an innovative laser procedure called pulsed KTP (potassium-titanyl-phosphate) to treat vascular malformations of the vocal cord. Such malformations are common in professional speakers such as teachers, lawyers, deejays and stock exchange traders, as well as all types of singers. "The KTP laser causes no scarring or changes to the voice because it focuses heat in the blood vessels," explained Lee Akst, MD, assistant professor, Department of Otolaryngology, Stritch. "This is in contrast to cauterization and other forms of laser surgery, which apply excessive heat to the vocal cords and leave them stiff, causing damage to the voice."

Dr. Akst completed a fellowship in 2006 with KTP laser specialist Steven Zeitels, MD, of Massachusetts General Hospital, who helped several celebrities by using the pioneering technology.

"Physicians may refer patients who can't meet their professional speaking or singing demands and are hoarse for more than two weeks," Dr. Akst said. "The KTP laser is a minimally invasive technology that allows us to treat lesions precisely while saving underlying superficial lamina propria, the substance that helps vocal cords vibrate and which allows for good voice production."

The KTP laser also helps patients with respiratory papillomatosis by ablating these recurring benign tumors of the vocal cord while minimizing scar tissue. "In addition, the technology is effective in the treatment of dysplasia in cases of vocal cord premalignancy or early cancer," Dr. Akst added. In many cases, patients can be treated with the KTP laser as a clinic procedure using local anesthesia rather than in the operating room, which provides greater convenience, faster healing times and less risk to the patient.

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