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A Lean Neck Mass Clinic Model: Adding Value to Care

Brittney N. Tillman, M.D.¹, Tiffany A. Glazer, M.D.¹, Amrita Ray, B.S.¹, J. Chad Brenner, Ph.D.^{1,2}, and Matthew E. Spector, M.D.^{1,2}

¹Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

²Comprehensive Cancer Center, University of Michigan Medical School, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

Abstract

Objective—To demonstrate that ultrasound guided fine needle aspiration (USFNA) with on-site cytopathologic analysis eliminates unnecessary diagnostic testing, return visits, repeat procedures and optimizes quality of care.

Study Design—Retrospective Cohort

Methods—61 new patients (28 female; 33 male; age range 19-85) were seen in our dedicated neck mass clinic over a one-year period. All patients underwent USFNA of masses located in neck levels I-VI (40), parotid gland (20), or parapharyngeal space (1). Each patient underwent two USFNA passes followed by on-site cytopathologic analysis with additional passes if required for diagnosis.

Results—Diagnosis was made in 93.4% (57) of patients allowing for counseling and treatment planning at the first visit. In order to obtain a diagnosis, more than half (57.4%, 35) of our patients required additional passes which implies that they would have required an additional visit without on-site cytopathologic analysis. Treatment included: Observation in 42.6% (26) of patients, surgery in 32.8 % (20) of patients and nonsurgical treatment (chemotherapy, radiation, other) in 24.6% (15) of patients. The average time from check-in to checkout including the clinic visit, biopsy and treatment counseling was 103 minutes, and the average round trip mileage traveled per patient was 127.6 miles.

Conclusion—The adult neck mass is a commonly encountered scenario in otolaryngology. For the patient this can be a stressful situation in which timely and accurate diagnosis is critical. A dedicated lean neck mass clinic model with USFNA and on-site cytopathologic analysis can be both an efficient part of one's practice and a valuable addition to patient care.

Corresponding author: Matthew E. Spector, M.D., University of Michigan Health System, Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, 1500 E Medical Center Dr., 1904 TC, SPC 5312, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-5312, 734 936-3172 phone, 734 232-1007 fax, mspector@med.umich.edu.

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Neck mass; FNA; ultrasound

INTRODUCTION

Early diagnosis and management is critical for successful treatment in patients who present with neck masses as sequela of malignancy. For patients with benign disease who present with a neck mass, early diagnosis can also be very valuable at alleviating concerns and anxiety. As there is no gold standard diagnostic algorithm for these patients, our team orchestrated a new lean neck mass clinic model with the hopes of improving care for this patient population.

Lean management principles are largely attributed to Taiichi Ohno and were initially used in Toyota manufacturing in Japan. The goal of lean management is to remove waste from a process so that all remaining work is value-added while serving a customer's needs.^{1, 2} Utilizing lean principles, we describe our dedicated neck mass clinic and demonstrate that in office ultrasound guided fine needle aspiration (USFNA) with immediate on-site cytopathologic analysis eliminates unnecessary diagnostic testing, return visits, repeat procedures and optimizes quality of care.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was performed as a retrospective cohort with University of Michigan Institutional Review Board approval (HUM00087331). A total of 117 new patients were seen in our lean neck mass clinic over a one-year period. Patients were excluded if they were given a diagnosis prior to presentation, had imaging and/or ultrasound characteristics which were diagnostic negating need for USFNA, or if they did not undergo USFNA for other reasons (48). A total of 61 new patients (28 female; 33 male; age range 19-85) met inclusion criteria. Patients were not required to hold any medication prior to their office visit, including anticoagulants. All included patients underwent a history, head and neck physical exam, review of any prior imaging, and USFNA of masses of at least 5 mm located in neck levels I-VI (40), parotid gland (20), or parapharyngeal space (1). Each patient underwent two USFNA passes followed by on-site cytopathologic analysis. The patients underwent additional passes with repeat cytopathologic analysis if required with the goal of preliminary diagnosis at the same visit. On-site core needle biopsy was performed if there was concern for lymphoma based on history and physical, particularly if the patient complained of B symptoms, or if the cytopathologist requested additional tissue to make a diagnosis and/or treatment plan based on FNA (6).

All office based USFNA procedures were performed by one staff otolaryngologist with expertise in head and neck oncology as well as American College of Surgeons Thyroid and Parathyroid Ultrasound certification. Ultrasound was performed with doppler as appropriate to further delineate any vascular involvement. The lesions were visualized on ultrasound, marked appropriately, and then local anesthetic (1% lidocaine with 1/100,00 epinephrine) was injected into the presumed FNA trajectory. Next, a 22G needle was used to aspirate the

mass under ultrasound guidance and documented. Two passes were performed (**Figure 1**). The specimens were then immediately handed off to the on-site cytopathologist or cytotechnician for immediate processing and reviewed in person or via telecommunication with an off-site cytopathologist. Repeat passes were performed if the specimen was inadequate as necessary. The cytopathologist reported their preliminary diagnosis to the surgeon to be shared with the patient followed by counseling and planning if appropriate.

RESULTS

Diagnosis was made in 93.4% (57) of patients allowing for counseling and treatment planning at the first visit (Figure 2). In order to obtain a diagnosis, more than half (57.4%, 35) of our patients required additional passes which implies that they would have required an additional visit without on-site cytopathologic analysis. On-site core needle biopsy was performed in 8.7% (6) of patients if lymphoma was highest on the differential diagnosis or if additional tissue was required for diagnosis and/or treatment planning. All patients with a parotid mass received a diagnosis at the first visit. Of the four patients that did not receive a diagnosis at the first visit and required additional workup, three had neck masses (2 level I, 1 level IV) and one had a parapharyngeal space mass.

The average time from check-in to checkout including the clinic visit, biopsy and treatment counseling was 103 minutes. The average round trip mileage traveled per patient was 127.6 miles. Treatment included: Observation in 47.5% (29) of patients, surgery in 31.1% (19) of patients and nonsurgical treatment (chemotherapy +/- radiation) in 21.3% (13) of patients (**Table 1**). There were no major complications reported in any patient, including infection, hematoma, or neuropathy.

Of the 19 patients who had surgical therapy, 16 patients had their diagnosis confirmed on final pathology. The other three patients all had low grade salivary gland neoplasms on their USFNA. After surgical excision, these were further stratified as an oncocytoma (1), basal cell adenoma (1), and low grade mucoepidermoid carcinoma (1).

DISCUSSION

Our clinical model provides a standardized algorithm that promotes expedient diagnosis, counseling, and formation of a treatment plan. By reducing time to diagnosis and the need for return visits, this model decreases wait times for new referrals and allows the surgeon to see more new patients. Additionally, office based ultrasound and ultrasound guided procedures have been proven to be a cost effective tool for the head and neck surgeon.³ In office USFNA often avoids the need for further imaging for diagnosis or alternatively, guides further imaging for treatment planning if needed.

Though USFNA has a higher sensitivity and specificity when compared to conventional FNA with palpation alone, it historically fails to provide an adequate sample or has indeterminate cytologic findings in 10-20% of cases.^{4,5} On-site cytopathologic review can immediately assess the adequacy of a specimen and improve diagnostic yield. A recent study by Moberly et al. compared methods of review for USFNA and found that the diagnostic rate was increased and the rate of adequate specimens obtained showed a positive trend

when a cytopathologist was present at the time of biopsy.⁶ With immediate cytologic analysis, the surgeon has the ability to communicate with the cytopathologist regarding differential diagnosis and concerns based on history, physical, and ultrasound characteristics which may also enhance diagnostic yield.

The patient benefits most greatly from this practice model. Prior to the opening of this clinic, a patient presenting with a neck mass would be referred to any available new head and neck patient slot with any number of otolaryngology providers. Their workup from that point would be entirely provider specific and may have included: history and physical only, further radiologic imaging, pathology- or radiology-performed FNA, physician-performed FNA, or physician-performed USFNA without on-site cytopathologic analysis. Patients almost always required at least two to three visits for diagnosis and counseling. Some providers also routinely performed operative excisional biopsy after a non-diagnostic FNA.

Patients specifically benefit from reduced time to diagnosis as most patients are given a preliminary diagnosis on the day of their first visit. There is improved diagnostic accuracy with USFNA with on-site cytopathology which decreases the need for repeat procedures and leads to decreased patient discomfort overall. There is reduced risk to the patient in our model for several reasons. First, they avoid radiation from additional imaging. Secondly, they avoid the anesthetic risk from an excisional biopsy. Thirdly, since we do not require the patient to hold anticoagulation for USFNA, their risk of thromboembolic events is reduced. Lastly, since cytotechnicians can immediately assess the quality of an FNA sample, repeat passes do not require additional anesthetic, and patients have reported less pain than traditional FNA. Patients incur less cost as this model requires less trips to our facility in which they must pay for transportation, meals and parking, and has a reduced need for radiologic studies and diagnostic operative intervention, both of which can cost a patient thousands of dollars. Patients benefit emotionally as they are rarely left waiting for a diagnosis, leading to less anxiety in the weeks between office visits. They also are provided with counseling at their first visit which either provides them with reassurance or assists them in early planning.

CONCLUSION

The adult neck mass is a commonly encountered scenario in otolaryngology. For the patient this can be a stressful situation in which timely and accurate diagnosis is critical. A dedicated lean neck mass clinic model with USFNA and on-site cytopathologic analysis can be both an efficient part of one's practice and a valuable addition to patient care.

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Figure 1.

A. Exam room setup for a right sided neck mass. Note that sharp instruments are out of patient sight which may help ease anxiety. The patient is asked to visualize the ultrasound screen which assists with access. B. After ultrasound exam, the expected trajectory is marked and local anesthetic is injected. C. A 22 G needle is used to perform the FNA with negative pressure. D. The needle is visualized under US guidance and multiple micropasses are made within the mass in order to improve diagnostic yield before releasing the plunger and withdrawing the needle.

Figure 2.

Depicts how a diagnosis was obtained for the 61 patients who visited our neck mass clinic. Diagnosis was made in 93.4% (57) of patients at their first visit; more than half (57.4%, 35) of these patients required additional passes, which implies that they would have required an additional visit without on-site cytopathologic analysis. Of the four patients who did not receive a diagnosis after first visit, two obtained a diagnosis after additional studies, and no diagnosis was made in the other two.

Table 1

Breakdown of patient characteristics, clinic findings, and outcomes.

Age	Sex	Location	Additional passes?	Diagnosis at first visit?	Diagnosis	Outcome
81	F	Parotid	Y	Y	Warthins tumor	Observation
68	M	Level IV	Y	N	None (reactive lymphadenopathy)	Observation
48	M	Level II	N	Y	Benign salivary gland tissue	Observation
53	M	Level II	Y	Y	Squamous cell carcinoma	Non-surgical treatment
28	F	Anterior neck	N	Y	Thyroglossal duct cyst	Observation
24	F	Level I	N	Y	Reactive lymphadenopathy	Observation
61	F	Level I	N	Y	Sialoceles	Observation
24	M	Level V	Y	Y	Lymphoma	Non-surgical treatment
66	F	Level I	Y	Y	Reactive lymphadenopathy	Observation
56	M	Level I	Y	Y	Reactive lymphadenopathy	Observation
77	M	Level II-IV bilat	N	Y	Lymphoma	Non-surgical treatment
39	F	Level II-IV	N	Y	Pleomorphic adenoma	Surgical treatment
63	M	Level II	N	Y	Squamous cell carcinoma	Surgical treatment
80	M	Level II	Y	Y	Merkel cell carcinoma	Surgical treatment
89	M	Levels I-V	Y	Y	Lymphoma	Non-surgical treatment
57	M	Level II	Y	Y	Squamous cell carcinoma	Surgical treatment
63	M	Level II	Y	Y	Poorly differentiated carcinoma	Non-surgical treatment
51	M	Levels I-V	Y	Y	Infection/tuberculosis	Non-surgical treatment
59	F	Level VI	Y	Y	Nodular hyperplasia	Observation
63	M	Parotid	Y	Y	Squamous cell carcinoma	Surgical treatment
70	M	Level I	Y	N	None (sialadenitis)	Further workup, non-surgical treatment
39	M	Parotid	N	Y	Simple cyst	Surgical treatment
94	F	Parotid	N	Y	Low grade oncocytic neoplasm	Observation
68	F	Level I	Y	Y	Reactive lymphadenopathy	Observation
72	F	Parotid	N	Y	Pleomorphic adenoma	Surgical treatment
30	F	Parotid	Y	Y	Parotid cyst	Surgical treatment
59	M	Level II	N	Y	Squamous cell carcinoma	Non-surgical treatment
70	M	Parotid	N	Y	Parotid cyst	Observation
25	M	Level V	N	Y	Reactive lymphadenopathy	Observation
69	F	Level II	Y	Y	Squamous cell carcinoma	Non-surgical treatment
66	F	Level V	N	Y	Reactive lymphadenopathy	Observation
66	F	Parotid	Y	Y	Warthin's tumor	Surgical treatment
44	F	Level I	Y	Y	Reactive lymphadenopathy	Observation
50	M	Parapharyngeal	Y	N	None (paraganglioma)	Further workup, observation
47	M	Parotid	N	Y	Pleomorphic adenoma	Surgical treatment
77	M	Parotid	Y	Y	Granulation	Observation

Age	Sex	Location	Additional passes?	Diagnosis at first visit?	Diagnosis	Outcome
65	M	Parotid	N	Y	Warthin's tumor	Observation
77	F	Level II	N	Y	Warthin's tumor	Observation
30	M	Parotid	Y	Y	Pleomorphic adenoma	Surgical treatment
67	F	Level I	Y	Y	Low grade malignancy	Surgical treatment
67	F	Level II	Y	Y	Venous malformation	Observation
53	M	Level II	Y	Y	Squamous cell carcinoma	Non-surgical treatment
66	M	Level III	Y	Y	Paraganglioma	Observation
60	F	Parotid	Y	Y	Low grade neoplasm	Surgical treatment
20	F	Level II	Y	Y	Reactive lymphadenopathy	Observation
47	M	Level II-IV	Y	Y	Squamous cell carcinoma	Non-surgical treatment
64	M	Parotid	N	Y	Warthins	Non-surgical treatment
63	M	Level V	Y	Y	Pleomorphic lipoma	Surgical treatment
67	M	Parotid	N	Y	Low grade neoplasm	Observation
67	F	Parotid	N	Y	Low grade neoplasm	Surgical treatment
50	M	Level V	N	Y	Simple cyst	Observation
85	F	Parotid - bilat	N	Y	Warthin's tumor	Observation
29	M	Level II	N	Y	Branchial cleft cyst	Surgical treatment
19	M	Level I	Y	N	None (schwannoma)	Further workup, surgical treatment
51	F	Parotid	N	Y	Pleomorphic adenoma	Surgical treatment
52	F	Parotid	Y	Y	Warthin's tumor	Observation
63	F	Level V	Y	Y	Lymphoma	Non-surgical treatment
33	M	Level V	Y	Y	Lymphoma	Non-surgical treatment
41	F	Level VI	N	Y	Papillarythyroid carcinoma	Surgical treatment
29	F	Parotid	N	Y	Pleomorphic adenoma	Surgical treatment
58	F	Level II-IV bilat	Y	Y	Non-caseating granuloma	Non-surgical treatment