

## **A Less-invasive Throat Cancer Treatment**

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kbrannon@tulane.edu

Tulane University School of Medicine surgeon Dr. Paul Friedlander is one of the first in the state to perform a new, less-invasive form of robotic surgery to treat head and neck cancers.



Dr. Paul Friedlander, chair of the Department of Otolaryngology at Tulane, says robotic surgery avoids big incisions and preserves quality of life for throat cancer patients. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The technique, which was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration last year, uses the latest da Vinci three-dimensional, high-definition robotic equipment to make an incision through the mouth to remove tumors without a visible scar. Traditional open surgery to remove throat cancer typically requires a long incision through the jaw and throat.

The new approach has fewer complications, faster recovery, quicker return of speech and swallowing functions, and patients can often avoid chemotherapy following radiation treatment. Patients can be released from the hospital within a day for the new procedure compared to a week- to 10-day stay following the traditional technique, Friedlander says.

“This is a huge technological leap in terms of treatment,” says Friedlander, chair of the Department of [Otolaryngology](#). “Robotic-assisted surgery for tonsil and tongue cancers provides us with greater vision and precision, and significantly improves the patient's quality of life by avoiding the large external incisions and longer recovery times associated with the traditional approaches.”

Throat cancer occurs in the larynx (voice box) and pharynx (throat), which includes the base of the tongue and tonsils. There are about 36,000 new cases per year. It usually develops in adults over 50. Studies show people with a history of alcohol and tobacco use have a higher incidence of the disease. However, new research has also linked it to the human papillomavirus (HPV), which can be transmitted through oral sex.

Symptoms of throat cancer include abnormal-sounding breathing, coughing, neck or throat pain, difficulty swallowing or a lump outside of the neck. For more information call the Department of Otolaryngology at 504-988-5454 or [Tulane Medical Center](#) at 504-988-5800.