

Cancer Institute Offers Free Head and Neck Cancer Screenings

Five minutes is all it takes to get screened for head and neck cancer. The free screenings will be performed by specialists in otolaryngology head and neck surgery and sponsored by SimmonsCooper Cancer Institute (SCCI) at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Springfield. They are open to the public.

Dr. K. Thomas Robbins, SCCI director, hopes the annual screening event will raise awareness about these cancers during National Oral Head and Neck Cancer Awareness Week.

The free screenings will be held 4 to 7 p.m. Monday, April 12, and 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, April 17, at SIU Head and Neck Surgery Clinic, St. John's Pavilion, 301 N. 8th Street, 5th floor. Call Pam at 217-545-6150 between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays to register.

"Use of any type of tobacco, such as chewing tobacco, cigarettes, cigars or a pipe, increases the risk for head and neck cancers," Robbins explained. "This is the most important risk factor." Other factors include consuming alcohol on a regular basis and a family history of head and neck cancer.

Danger signs include a lump in the neck, persistent hoarseness, sore throat or pain, ear pain or difficulty swallowing – with any of these lasting longer than three weeks.

"The examination is very simple and painless and takes very little time but may catch a very treatable cancer in its earliest stages," said Dr. James Malone, associate professor of otolaryngology head and neck surgery and SCCI member. "The exam includes the patient's face, neck, lips and mouth. We look at the insides of the patient's lips and cheeks to check for possible signs of cancer, such as red and/or white patches. The tongue is checked for swelling or other abnormalities, as is the throat. We also inspect the area under the jaw and the side of the neck for lumps that may be suspicious."

Patients who wear dentures, plates or partials will need to remove them for the exam.