

Age Is Not a Contraindication for Thyroid Surgery

BY BRUCE JANCIN
Denver Bureau

CHICAGO — Octogenarians undergoing thyroid surgery experience a markedly increased rate of serious perioperative complications, compared with younger patients, according to Dr. Michal Mekel.

Dr. Mekel of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, presented a retrospective study involving 90 consecutive patients over age 80 years and 242 ran-

domly selected 18- to 79-year-olds, all of whom underwent thyroid surgery at the hospital during the same recent period. Eighty percent of the octogenarians were women, Dr. Mekel reported at the annual meeting of the American Thyroid Association.

The overall 30-day complication rate was 23.3% in octogenarians and 9.1% in controls. Moreover, most affected octogenarians had multiple complications. However, no deaths occurred in either group.

Mean length of stay was 1.67 days in patients over age 80 years, compared with 1.23 days in the younger group.

The most frequent complications in patients over age 80 years were cardiovascular, with 6.7% of octogenarians being affected. Pulmonary complications, occurring in 3.3%, were next most common.

Complications experienced only by the octogenarians included atrial fibrillation, other arrhythmias, heart failure, pneu-

monia, ischemic colitis, tracheostomy, urosepsis, blood transfusion, reintubation, and sternotomy-related wound infection secondary to resection of a large substernal goiter.

In a multivariate analysis, comorbid respiratory conditions proved to be an independent risk factor for perioperative complications in patients over age 80 years, conferring a 9.9-fold increased risk. Female gender was associated with a 3.3-fold increased risk of perioperative complications in the elderly.

Interestingly, advanced age was not an independent risk factor for serious complications. This finding underscores the point that while careful selection of elderly candidates for thyroid surgery is warranted, advanced biologic age is not a contraindication to surgery, Dr. Mekel emphasized. ■

Whites, Women More Prone to Thyroid Disease

CHICAGO — The prevalence of thyroid cancer and other forms of thyroid disease in the United States is markedly greater in whites and females.

Preliminary data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey for 2005-2006 showed that an estimated 13.3 million Americans have thyroid disease, including nearly 240,000 who have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer, Dr. Pramil Cheriya reported at the annual meeting of the American Thyroid Association.

The prevalence of thyroid disease was 7.8% among whites, 2.7% among blacks, and 1.8% in Hispanics. The prevalence was 7.1% in females and 1.7% in males, according to Dr. Cheriya of Harrisburg (Pa.) Hospital. Nearly 89% of individuals with thyroid disease had health insurance.

Unlike many other types of cancer, thyroid cancer has traditionally been more common among whites. That remains the case. The etiology of this powerful association among race, sex, and thyroid cancer remains unclear.

—Bruce Jancin

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