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Facing 2009 with New Technologies in Facial Plastic Surgery
ENT Doctors Highlight Surgical Innovations in the Coming Year

Alexandria, Va. – With the recent reports of a successful facial transplant in the U.S., many people are curious about the future of facial plastic surgery techniques and research. As medical doctors who are specifically trained to surgically correct and enhance the ears, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck, the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS) would like to highlight some of the exciting new technologies and trends in facial plastic surgical medicine in the coming year.

- **Facial transplant surgery:** Is an extremely new and groundbreaking medical procedure that has only been successfully completed on four patients in the world. The surgery involves a multidisciplinary team of surgeons, including otolaryngologist – head and neck surgeons, working together to complete the complex and intricate process. The procedure involves the full or partial removal of skin tissue, muscles, nerves, bones, and blood vessels from a clinically brain dead donor face. Depending on the extent of injury or disfigurement in the recipient's face and neck, a team of surgeons will then begin rebuilding the damaged or deformed areas with the transplanted tissue. Each individual component has to be reconnected to its recipient counterpart to restore function and viability to the transplanted face (donor artery to recipient artery, nerve to nerve, muscle to muscle, etc). The recipient will need to be placed on a lifetime regimen of immunosuppressive medications to ensure the transplanted tissues aren't rejected, but the goal of the surgery is restore a patient's ability to function in society and significantly enhance their quality of life.
- **Robotic surgical techniques:** Over the past several years, major innovations have been made in the area of robotic surgical procedures. Used in a variety of different surgical settings, robotic applications have significantly simplified many complex procedures. For patients, the benefits include less blood loss, pain, and quicker recovery times. In otolaryngology, robotic surgical techniques can be used in head and neck cancer cases, facial plastic surgery, and airway procedures.
- **Tissue regeneration:** Tissue engineering is a multidisciplinary area of research aimed at regeneration of tissues and restoration of organ function. Therapies in various stages of development that will likely have a significant impact on the care of otolaryngology patients include regeneration of bone, cartilage, mucosa, nerve, skeletal muscle, salivary tissue, hearing and balance organs, endocrine organs, and trachea. Current preclinical research into a tissue-engineered trachea and tissue-engineered cartilage for ear and nasal reconstruction has shown promising results.

Otolaryngologist – facial plastic surgeons are uniquely trained medical doctors that can perform a variety of facial, head, and neck surgical procedures. Unlike other surgeons, otolaryngologist – facial plastic surgeons not only complete a four year specialized residency in Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, which includes Facial Plastic Surgery, but many also undergo an additional one-year fellowship in Facial Plastic Surgery and become certified by the American Board of Otolaryngology and in many cases, also certified by the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. Their total training can exceed 20 years of education and clinical practice.

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The range of conditions that otolaryngologists diagnose and treat are widely varied and can involve the whole face, nose, lips, ears, and neck. Facial plastic surgery treats a specific component of these conditions and can be divided into two types—reconstructive and cosmetic.

Reconstructive plastic surgery is performed for patients with conditions that may be present from birth, such as birthmarks on the face and cleft lip and palate. Other conditions that are the result of accidents, trauma, burns, or previous surgery are also corrected with this type of surgery. In addition, some reconstructive procedures are required to treat existing diseases like skin cancer.

The face transplant procedure and other surgical innovations are exciting examples of how the future of medicine is not just in technology, but also collaborative, cross-specialty medicine and patient care.

A full Q & A about the face transplant with Daniel Alam, M.D., AAO-HNS member and primary microvascular surgeon on the team that performed the face transplant is available at www.entnet.org. Reporters wishing to interview Dr. Alam can contact newsroom@entnet.org.

About the AAO-HNS

The American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery (www.entnet.org), one of the oldest medical associations in the nation, represents nearly 12,000 physicians and allied health professionals who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the ears, nose, throat, and related structures of the head and neck. The Academy serves its members by facilitating the advancement of the science and art of medicine related to otolaryngology and by representing the specialty in governmental and socioeconomic issues. The organization's vision: "Empowering otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons to deliver the best patient care."

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