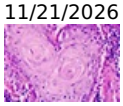
Gene expression helps determine risk of head and neck cancer metastasis.

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When cancer metastasizes, or spreads from its original site to other parts of the body, the chances of fatality increase dramatically. Physicians keep this fact in mind when advising patients on the best treatment options. Most head and neck cancer can be treated without operating on the lymph nodes, but it is difficult to guarantee that there are no small lymph node metastases remaining in the patient after treatment. For this reason, many patients undergo surgery, even if there are not, in fact, metastases in their lymph nodes.

A recent presentation at the 3rd International Conference on innovative approaches in Head and Neck Oncology (ICHNO) presented a new approach that may better predict who needs surgery and who does not. Scientists from the Radbound University Nijmegen Medical Centre in the Netherlands have identified an additional means of determining the risk of metastasis. They examined the activity of 825 genes that had previously been identified as being relevant to process. The gene expression test accurately predicted an absence of metastases in 89% of the 222 cases examined.

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