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Contact: Sam Caruso, Jr.
carusos@smhplus.org
985-649-8834

Karen Hales
halesk@smhplus.org
985-649-8616

Obstructive Sleep Apnea Puts Operative Patients at Risk *The Slidell Sleep Disorders Center urges patients to identify their risk level before undergoing surgery or other medical procedures*

SLIDELL, La.—June 26, 2009—Researchers have developed a highly accurate, cost-effective screening tool that detects patients' risk level of obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) to ensure the safety of those undergoing anesthesia. The Slidell Memorial Hospital Sleep Disorders Center, a full-service sleep center specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of all sleep disorders, encourages patients awaiting surgical procedures requiring anesthesia to use this tool to prevent complications.

OSA is the most prevalent breathing disturbance in sleep and is characterized by repeated episodes of cessation of breathing due to a narrowing of the airway.

“Postoperative complications in patients who suffer from OSA are especially serious,” said Dr. Hans Schuller of the Slidell Memorial Hospital Sleep Disorders Center. “They are more likely to have difficult intubation, longer hospital stays and increased intensive care admissions.

“Even minimally invasive diagnostic procedures such as Endoscopy and biopsy procedures may be of greater risk to OSA sufferers,” he added.

OSA is also known to be an independent risk factor for heart attacks, high blood pressure, irregular heart rhythms, Diabetes and has even been associated with a higher risk for car accidents, Dr. Schuller reported.

The most reliable way to identify OSA is through an overnight sleep study; however, most surgical patients do not undergo such studies because of time constraints before surgery. The STOP test, created by a team of anesthesiologists from the University of Toronto, allows patients to accurately assess their risk of OSA easily.

The STOP test consists of four questions: **S**: Do you *snore* loudly? **T**: Do you often feel *tired*, fatigued or sleepy during daytime? **O**: Has anyone *observed* you *stop* breathing during sleep? **P**: Do you have or are you being treated for high blood *pressure*?

Answering “yes” to two or more of these questions ranks a patient as being at high risk for OSA. When combined with other known risk factors for OSA — high body mass index, age over 50, large neck circumference and male gender — the sensitivity for predicting OSA was even greater.

Although OSA affects an estimated 2 to 26 percent of the general population, nearly 80 percent of men and 93 percent of women with moderate to severe sleep apnea are unaware they have the disorder.

According to the American Society of Anesthesiologists, the estimated average life span of an untreated OSA patient is 20 years shorter than the average life span of the rest of the population.

The validation of the STOP test and similar questionnaires offers anesthesiologists and other health care professionals simple, reliable tools for assessing OSA in their surgical patients, allowing them to detect high-risk factors before surgery and improve patient safety.

Slidell Memorial Hospital Sleep Disorders Center

The Slidell Memorial Hospital Sleep Disorders Center is a full-service sleep center specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of all sleep disorders. The most experienced center on the Northshore opened in 1986 and is located in the SMH Founders Building on Robert Blvd. It features four private bedrooms with a full complement of the comforts of home. Medical Director Hans Shuller, M.D., leads a staff of highly trained professionals in providing compassionate care and education to patients of all types and ages. For more information, visit the Web site at www.slidellmemorial.org. The SMH Sleep Disorders Center is accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and is a Community Partner of the National Sleep Foundation to educate people about the importance of sleep and the treatment of sleep disorders.

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