

Neck Dissection Surgery Helped Ensure TV Newsman Danny New Remains Cancer-Free

After thyroid cancer, Danny New had 50 lymph nodes removed and started radioactive iodine at the University of Colorado Cancer Center.

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“I got lucky that I suck at golf. I threw my back out playing a sport that people usually enjoy in khakis.”

Danny New can joke about it now, but at the time the situation was much more serious. It was January 2021, and New, a former TV news reporter for ABC affiliate Denver7 who now works for ABC’s national news team in New York, injured his back while golfing. The MRI he got to diagnose his back issues revealed a bigger problem — a tumor on his thyroid gland that turned out to be cancerous.

“I had a really good nurse practitioner who said, ‘You throw your back out a lot. Let’s just get you an MRI.’ And that’s when they found it,” New says. “In a sense, I got lucky.”

Cancer Remains After Surgery

New, who lived in Florida at the time, had surgery to remove his thyroid, which is the standard of care for people with [thyroid cancer](#). He gained 10 pounds after the surgery as doctors worked to perfect the dosage of his hormone replacement medicine. The surgery also affected his voice, which, for someone in the live news business, was potentially career-killing.

“The thyroid is in the same relative area as the voice box,” he says. “I was really raspy for a while, and I had to go speech pathology for six months and work to get my voice back. That was scary.”

When New moved to Denver in January 2022 to work for Channel 7, one of his first stops was the [thyroid cancer multidisciplinary clinic](#) at the [University of Colorado Cancer Center](#), where he was seen in one day by a team that included [Bryan Haugen](#), MD, professor of medicine in endocrinology, metabolism and diabetes in the [CU School of Medicine](#), and [Robert McIntyre](#), MD, professor of surgery in GI, trauma and endocrine surgery, as well as other endocrine and surgery

thyroid cancer specialists, advanced practice providers, pathologists, radiologists, and medical oncologists.

New's doctors in Florida had discovered cancer in one lymph node in his neck following his surgery, so he was under active surveillance — getting blood tests and ultrasounds every six months to make sure the cancer wasn't spreading. Haugen and McIntyre advised New to get the positive lymph node and surrounding lymph nodes removed before the cancer had the chance to spread further.

"Dr. McIntyre and I saw him together, and we thought the lymph node looked concerning," Haugen says. "We could have kept him on observation, but we recommended that we do surgery in that area. It was nice that we could bring him into the multidisciplinary clinic and get things moving more quickly."

Surgery Plus Iodine

New had a surgery called a lateral neck dissection, in which surgeons remove a section of lymph nodes, then check to see if any cancer is in the nodes still left in the body. New ended up having 50 lymph nodes removed before the surgeon was satisfied that no positive nodes remained.

"He only had one or two that were abnormal on ultrasound, but if you see two abnormal lymph nodes, you're almost certain to have more that are cancerous," Haugen says. "They used to do what they call berry picking, just to remove the abnormal-looking ones, but with the neck dissection, we remove all the lymph nodes. If the pathologist looks at those removed lymph nodes and only sees five out of 50 that are positive for cancer, as in Danny's case, that's really good."

Following the surgery, Haugen also gave New a course of radioactive iodine, a treatment specific to thyroid cancer that ensures no cancer cells remain.

"We call it our magic bullet," Haugen says. "Normal thyroid cells use iodine to make thyroid hormone, so they are very good at concentrating iodine from the blood. Interestingly, most thyroid cancers still behave like thyroid cells and still like to take up iodine. We use that to our advantage by giving people radioactive iodine, which goes into any residual normal thyroid cells, as well as the cancer cells, and radiate them. The radiation field is very short, so it can radiate those cells but not cause severe damage to other cells."

Moving Forward With Gratitude

Haugen says the combination of the radioactive iodine and the neck dissection surgery makes him fairly sure New's cancer won't return, but the newsman still gets regular blood tests and neck ultrasounds just to be sure. It's an inconvenience, but it's one New gladly puts up with.

“It’s been annoying to have to deal with this, but I know there are much worse cancers and worse stages to have to be annoyed by,” he says. “I am grateful.”

That gratitude extends to his care team at the CU Cancer Center, including Haugen, whom New praises for his willingness to share information.

“He’ll answer any question. We had some crazy questions, because we don’t know this stuff,” New says. “For a guy who’s been around for 40 years to still field all of our questions — I’m really grateful for it. I’ve never had cancer before, and it’s scary. He doesn’t seem to have lost sight of his empathy, and he’s got a really strong dose of it.”

Check Yourself

After his thyroid cancer experience, New has a simple message for his family, friends, and viewers: “check ya neck” — and the rest of your body as well.

“You’ve just got to feel yourself — your testicles, your neck, your breasts; there’s a lot of great information online that tells you how to do it,” he says. “It’s a little scary — these are all tender places that you’re not used to feeling around. But if you have people in your life that you care about — in my case, it’s my wife and my family and my cat — you do it for them. It doesn’t take that long, and trust me — you want to find this stuff early.”

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