Story highlights and opportunities:

- Kidney cancer symptoms can be mistaken for menopause. (Patient example below.)
- Kidney cancer can be diagnosed incidentally, when being treated for something else. (Patient example below.)
- Men are more likely than women to develop kidney cancer.
- A new robotic surgery procedure known as L.E.S.S. (laparoscopic endoscopic single site) radical nephrectomy is now possible for kidney cancer treatment.
- March is National Kidney Cancer Awareness Month.
- May is Women’s Health Month.
- June is Men’s Health Month.

For Immediate Release

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New Surgeries Provide More Hope for Kidney Cancer Patients
Local Surgeon Helps Lead New Fight Against Kidney Cancer

DENVILLE, N.J. (March 15, 2010) – The American Cancer Society estimates that there are 57,760 new cases of kidney cancer in the United States annually, with 12,980 people dying from the disease.¹ Fortunately for those diagnosed, kidney cancer is increasingly being recognized at early stages, and new surgeries provide better options for faster and more successful recoveries.

“Now, kidney cancer is more often being discovered as an incidental finding when someone goes to the emergency room for abdominal pain or back pain,” explained Gregg E. Zimmerman, M.D. of Morris Urology, a division of Garden State Urology; the medical director of robotic surgery at Saint Clare’s Hospital; and one of the few fellowship-trained urologic oncologists in northern Jersey with expertise in robotic surgery. “They’ll do a CAT scan for an unrelated issue and a kidney mass will be detected. As a result, we’re now finding kidney cancer at earlier stages, often before symptoms appear.”

Kidney cancer is generally treated surgically by complete removal, according to Dr. Zimmerman. “There is typically no role for radiation or chemotherapy at early stages,” he said. “The benefit of earlier detection is that tumors are usually much smaller in size, which can allow for removal of only part of the kidney, rather than the entire organ.”

About the Kidney

The kidneys are a necessary part of the urinary system. They filter our blood, removing wastes and extra water. When a kidney is diseased, it stops doing this job. Wastes build up, damaging the body. If not treated, kidney disease can lead to kidney failure, which
can cause death. People without functioning kidneys must go on dialysis in order to survive.

Although healthy normal individuals are born with two kidneys, people can function with just a portion of one kidney. According to Dr. Zimmerman, a quarter of one normal kidney is sufficient to sustain adequate renal function.

**Risk Factors, Signs and Symptoms**

“There are no clear causes of kidney cancer, but certain risk factors have been linked to kidney disease,” said Dr. Zimmerman. “This includes smoking and obesity. Also, people with Von Hippel-Lindau (VHL) and other genetic diseases are at greater risk, and so are people on long-term dialysis.”

Men are more likely than women to develop kidney cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, that translates to roughly 35,430 new cases that will be found in men this year as opposed to 22,330 new cases identified in women.

There is a classic triad of symptoms for the most common kidney cancer – renal cell carcinoma: blood in the urine, abdominal pain and flank pain. However, with earlier detection, this presentation is becoming much less common.

**Types of Surgery Used to Treat Kidney Cancer**

Surgery is used to treat kidney cancer by removing part, or all, of the kidney. There are three types of surgery available.

- **Open Radical Nephrectomy:** This traditional form of surgery requires a large open incision. It sometimes necessitates the removal of a rib. It is a major surgical procedure with a hospital stay of up to a week, significant pain and a long recovery.
- **Laparoscopic Radical Nephrectomy:** This procedure was introduced 15 to 20 years ago, and has become the gold standard for kidney removal. Several small incisions create “keyhole ports” which provide access to the cancer. The kidney is removed through a small incision just large enough for successful kidney removal. This is a technically more advanced procedure that requires additional training and skill. Benefits for the patient include a shorter hospital stay (one to two nights), less blood loss, less pain and a quicker recovery.
- **Partial Nephrectomy:** By finding cancer at earlier stages, and at smaller sizes, surgeons are now able to remove the tumors, sparing a significant portion of the kidney. This type of surgery is complex, presenting additional risks including delayed hemorrhage and urine leak. However, the benefits include preserving maximal renal function.
- **Robot-Assisted Laparoscopic Surgery:** This procedure combines the control of an open technique with the benefits of laparoscopy. The robot allows better
control and greater range of movement than is possible for a surgeon operating with his or her own hands inside the body. It allows surgeons to operate with extreme precision.

“As compared to laparoscopy, which is similar to using chopsticks as your hands, the robotic arms have wrists and elbows that mimic the natural movements of human hands,” explained Dr. Zimmerman. “This provides great precision when excising a tumor or suturing the kidney.”

Depending on the case, Dr. Zimmerman may decide to perform robotic surgery or laparoscopic surgery. If laparoscopic removal is the appropriate treatment, Dr. Zimmerman may consider a new procedure known as L.E.S.S. (laparoscopic endoscopic single site) radical nephrectomy. This is a procedure in which the surgery is performed through one small incision only.

Dr. Zimmerman became an expert in robotic surgery during his one-year urologic oncology fellowship, where he performed robotic surgeries on a daily basis. “It’s a very steep learning curve,” he said. “It was a huge advantage to learn robotic surgery during my training.”

An important factor is the surgeon’s level of experience in robotics. It is beneficial for patients to ask how many robotic procedures a surgeon has performed.

Patients should be aware that not all hospitals offer robotic procedures. Saint Clare’s Hospital made the decision to invest approximately $1.7 million to purchase its robot. Dr. Zimmerman led the panel that created the criteria for the program. Dr. Zimmerman also offers robotic and laparoscopic surgery at Morristown Memorial Hospital.

**Patient Examples**

**Susan Cloninger**

Susan Cloninger, age 55, was in the midst of menopause, or so she thought. But the intermittent bleeding and night sweats turned out to be something else.

“I was diagnosed with kidney cancer,” she explained, “after two years of those symptoms that I thought were a normal part of aging. With spotting from kidney blood, it’s intermittent. You bleed and then it goes away. My primary doctor didn’t even recognize it. A friend who was a nurse started asking me some pointed questions. After several tests, they found a large lesion on my kidney.”

The lesion ended up measuring about 26 cm. Cloninger’s choice of a surgeon depended upon finding someone who took her insurance. She eventually connected with Dr. Zimmerman.

“After looking at her films, I informed her that an attempt at laparoscopic removal was warranted,” said Dr. Zimmerman. “Although the tumor was very large, it appeared to be
confined to the kidney. I believed that we should start laparoscopically and if we were not making significant progress, we could easily and quickly switch to another approach. She agreed. The laparoscopic approach was successful. Instead of a week, she spent a couple of days in the hospital.”

Within a week, Cloninger was up and about at her regular schedule. Today, the mother of two is celebrating one year of being cancer-free.

Maxim Sungurov, M.D.
“I was diagnosed with kidney cancer incidentally, when I had an MRI for back pain,” said Maxim Sungurov, M.D. “The scan picked up the fact that I had a tumor but I had no symptoms yet. I wanted to get several opinions before choosing my surgeon. I met with Dr. Zimmerman, who recommended the robotic partial nephrectomy. I met with another a doctor at a New York City hospital for a second opinion. He recommended the open partial nephrectomy. It didn’t make sense to do the open procedure, with the prolonged recovery time and pain. I also felt that Dr. Zimmerman was the best of the best at this procedure. He had the medical expertise but also delivered the human touch. He was very interested in helping me. The operation went very well. I was released on the second post-surgical day, and I was out walking with my daughter and our dog on the third post-surgical day.”

“The tumor was completely removed and 75 percent of the kidney was spared,” said Dr. Zimmerman. “In fact, his overall renal function was unchanged after surgery. I called him two days later to give him the results of the pathology report. Apparently I interrupted him. He was at the movies watching *Avatar*.”

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About Dr. Zimmerman

Gregg E. Zimmerman, M.D., of Morris Urology, a division of Garden State Urology, is also the director of robotic surgery at Saint Clare’s Hospital. He is a leading member of the multidisciplinary oncology team when it comes to urologic care. He is one of the few fellowship-trained urologic oncologists in North Jersey with expertise in robotic surgery. He is also on the faculty of Morristown Memorial Hospital.

Zimmerman practices all aspects of urology, including treatment for prostate, kidney, bladder and testicular cancers; BPH; kidney stones; infertility; incontinence and overactive bladder; and pediatrics. He specializes in robotic and laparoscopic techniques.

Zimmerman earned his medical degree from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and completed his residency training in urology at the University of Florida. He completed his urologic oncology fellowship at Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo, N.Y., with specialty training in robotic surgery and advanced laparoscopy.

About Morris Urology
Gregg Zimmerman, M.D., and Marc Colton, M.D., offer state-of-the-art urologic care at Morris Urology, a division of Garden State Urology, based in Denville, N.J. The practice treats all aspects of urologic disease, including bladder, kidney and prostate cancers; kidney stones; and urinary incontinence. The practice is located at 16 Pocono Road, Suite 205, Denville, NJ 07834. Tel: 973.627.0060, Fax: 973.627.6821, www.morrisurology.com.

i Cancer Facts & Figures 2009, American Cancer Society.
ii Cancer Facts & Figures 2009, American Cancer Society.