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What is Otolaryngology?

Otolaryngology is a medical specialty which is focused on the ears, nose, and throat. It is also called otolaryngology-head and neck surgery because specialists are trained in both medicine and surgery. An otolaryngologist is often called an ear, nose, and throat doctor, or an ENT for short.

This medical specialty dates back to the 19th century, when doctors recognized that the head and neck contained a series of interconnected systems. Doctors developed techniques and tools for examining and treating problems of the head and neck, eventually forming a medical specialty. According to the American Academy of Otolaryngology, it is the oldest medical specialty in the United States.

Otolaryngologists differ from many physicians in that they are qualified to perform many types of surgery on the delicate and complex tissues of the head and neck.

What do Otolaryngologists Treat?

- **Ear:** Otolaryngologists are trained in the medical and surgical treatment of hearing loss, ear infections, balance disorders, ear noise (tinnitus), nerve pain, and facial and

cranial nerve disorders. They also manage congenital (birth) disorders of the outer and inner ear.

- **Nose:** Care of the nasal cavity and sinuses is one of the primary skills of otolaryngologists. Otolaryngologists diagnose, manage and treat allergies, sinusitis, smell disorders, polyps, and nasal obstruction due to a deviated septum. They can also correct the appearance of the nose (rhinoplasty surgery).
- **Throat:** Otolaryngologists have expertise in managing diseases of the larynx (voice box) and the upper aero-digestive tract or esophagus, including voice and swallowing disorders.
- **Head and Neck:** In the head and neck area, otolaryngologists are trained to treat infectious diseases, both benign and malignant (cancerous) tumors, facial trauma, and deformities of the face. They perform both cosmetic plastic and reconstructive surgery.

How are Otolaryngologist-Head and Neck Surgeons Trained?

An otolaryngologist is ready to start practicing after completing up to 15 years of college and post-graduate training. To receive certification from the American Board of Otolaryngology, individuals must first complete college, medical school, and at least five years of specialty training. Next, the physician must pass the American Board of Otolaryngology examination. Some then pursue a one- or two-year fellowship for more training in a subspecialty area. All full-time faculty at Columbia have completed fellowship training in their areas of expertise.

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