

Saturday, July 30, 2005

Guest Viewpoint: 'CyberKnife' at Wilson will benefit patients

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Cancer treatment in Greater Binghamton is about to take a great leap forward.

In September, United Health Services Hospitals, in association with Upstate Medical University's Department of Radiation Oncology and the Southern New York NeuroSurgical Group, will open the CyberKnife Center on the campus of Wilson Regional Medical Center.

When this happens, people in the community will begin experiencing the revolution taking place nationwide in the treatment of many forms of previously inoperable cancer.

The CyberKnife, developed by Accuray Corp. in cooperation with Stanford University, is a stereotactic radio-surgery system that combines robotics with the latest in image guidance to achieve state-of-the-art results.

Available today only at 25 medical centers in the United States, it can deliver beams of radiation to a specific tumor from hundreds of different angles.

The patient has the procedure without anesthesia, incisions or hospitalization, and experiences little if any discomfort. He or she can resume normal activities the same day.

This new treatment is more accurate than other forms of radio surgery. Because it is so micro-precise, it poses very little threat to surrounding normal tissue. It can be used on a wide range of cancerous growths and other lesions, including malignant and benign tumors and vascular malformations.

It also is approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration for use everywhere in the body that radiation therapy is indicated, including the head and neck, breasts, lungs, prostate, pancreas and liver. It treats tumors at body sites that are otherwise unreachable, and can be used for brain surgery in children, whose skulls often are too fragile for traditional treatment methods.

It's so advanced and sensitive, it even compensates for movement on the part of the patient. In addition, it is a cost-effective, outpatient treatment option that can help providers avoid many of the expenses associated with traditional surgery.

The development of the CyberKnife service is made possible by an outstanding partnership of physicians, hospitals, researchers and educators. For more than 40 years, the doctors and staff of the Department of Radiation Oncology at the State University of New York's Upstate Medical University have offered the upstate area excellence in cancer care, teaching and research.

This is seen in the quality of the providers, technology, resident training and laboratory research that have set us apart, and in our accreditation by the American College of Radiology, the most stringent accreditation process in the United States.

Our commitment to excellence resulted in the installation of new, state-of-the-art radiation therapy treatment and planning equipment in 1998, and is further evidenced in the creation of the first radiation oncology practice in Greater Binghamton to offer patients three-dimensional treatment planning and intensity modulated radiation therapy.

The opening of the program at Wilson came as a result of a strong alliance between University Hill and the United Health Services system, which is dedicated to building solid oncology services.

We continue this commitment with the introduction of CyberKnife radiosurgery. As the only facility of its kind in a 150-mile radius, it will serve people from a 43-county region, and will mean that Southern Tier patients won't have to leave their home area for the most advanced treatment available.

This is a great moment in the history of the community's efforts to treat cancer, and will have a positive impact for years to come, in the lives saved and the quality of life improved.

Chung is chairman of the Department of Radiation Oncology at the State University of New York's Upstate Medical University in Syracuse.

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