

# New technology treats brain tumour.. remotely

An oncologist based in Port Elizabeth has successfully treated a patient's brain tumour 1,000km away, using new remote technologies and surgery-free gamma radiation equipment.



Dr Cathryn Walton explains that the advanced new system from Elekta allows the oncologist to remotely plan and control the procedure via a laptop. The Gamma Knife radiosurgery equipment is based at Netcare Milpark hospital in Johannesburg, where the patient and the rest of the medical team were assembled. “By planning and controlling the procedure remotely, we are able to minimise time and treatment costs, with the same oncologist managing treatment throughout.

Gamma Knife is advanced and highly precise radiosurgery that may be used in place of brain surgery or whole brain radiation therapy in certain cases. It uses a single, high dose of gamma radiation delivered with the accuracy of less than one-tenth of a millimetre (about the thickness of a sheet of paper). It treats brain lesions with enough radiation to control them and can be used to treat targets even in the most critical, difficult-to-access areas of the brain. “This treatment is ground-breaking because in certain cases, it can eliminate the need for surgery – with the associated risk and lengthy recovery time – and the need for whole brain radiation – which affects the entire brain and can impair cognitive function later in life. This gives patients better outcomes and improved quality of life,” she says.

## Under an hour

An opportunity arose to harness this advanced new treatment when a 59-year-old male patient was found to have lesions in his brain last month. “The patient had previously undergone chemotherapy and understood the risks of whole brain radiation, so he was willing to undergo this new form of treatment, even though he was initially a little taken aback to learn that I would do the procedure from my rooms in Port Elizabeth,” says Walton.

The patient flew to Johannesburg and after an assessment and careful planning and quality assurance by teams in Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth, the procedure was carried out in under an hour. Nursing little more than a slight headache, the patient returned home the next day.

“It’s been very worthwhile learning to use the Gamma Knife system, and I’m very excited that we can now offer this treatment option to patients. The benefits it offers for quality of life and overall survival of the patient are wonderful. This is the way medicine is moving, and I’m delighted to be part of this progress.”

The Gamma Knife facility at Netcare Milpark Hospital is the only one of its kind in South Africa, with remote facilities now in Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth.

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