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Contact: Bob Beard
(434) 982-4490
reb8e@virginia.edu

**West Virginia Great-Grandmother is Patient Five Thousand for UVa's GAMMA Knife**

The Lars Leksell Gamma Knife center at the University of Virginia Health System set a milestone on August 1, when 75-year-old Macel Morris of Charleston, W.Va., became the 5,000th patient to undergo Gamma Knife treatment at UVa's University Hospital.

The Gamma Knife allows neurosurgeons to operate on the brain without actually entering the skull, preserving brain function and allowing for a faster recovery without pain or trauma. This form of minimally invasive surgery, called radiosurgery, uses 201 precisely-focused beams of cobalt 60 radiation to target brain lesions, producing a powerful biological effect on abnormal brain tissue. The beams are focused through a helmet-like device worn by the patient. "UVa is proud to have one of the most successful Gamma Knife programs in the United States. For patients and their families, experience means fewer complications and better technical success," said Dr Neal Kassell, professor and co-chair of neurosurgery at UVa.

Morris underwent Gamma Knife treatment for a rare, aggressive melanoma tumor close to her right optic nerve that was pressing on her eye and brain. Her treatment lasted about one hour, and she was back in her hospital bed shortly afterward, feeling a little tired but joking and visiting with her daughter and granddaughter. "Getting mad is a waste of energy," Morris said. "I trust in God and will get through this cancer with his help." Morris has 10 children, 23 grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren and enjoys working in her vegetable and flower gardens.

"The Gamma Knife gives Ms. Morris the very best treatment for her type of tumor," said Dr. Jason Sheehan, associate director of UVa's Gamma Knife center, who performed the procedure. "Because of the tumor's location, she was not a candidate for open surgery or conventional radiation therapy." The success rate for the type of tumor Morris has is about ninety percent with the Gamma Knife, Sheehan said, but it will take several months of tests to see if her treatment eradicated or shrank the tumor.

UVa's Gamma Knife was installed in March 1989 and is now on its second generation. The original instrument was the second in the U.S. and the fifth in the world. UVa neurosurgeon and director of the Gamma Knife center, Dr. Ladislau Steiner, was involved from the beginning in the development of the original Gamma Knife and its clinical application.

Patients have come to UVa for Gamma Knife surgery from almost every state and 52 foreign countries. In the Commonwealth, more than 2,300 Virginia residents have been treated, with the majority of patients coming from Fairfax County, Charlottesville-Albemarle, Richmond, Roanoke, Alexandria, Lynchburg and the Tidewater region. Typical medical conditions treated by the instrument are arteriovenous malformations (AVMs), brain tumors and functional disorders, such as trigeminal neuralgia and epilepsy.

The University of Virginia Gamma Knife center is the only institution in the U.S. to offer an accredited advanced radiosurgical training course for physicians. Forty-seven neurosurgeons from the U.S. and around the world have received their Gamma Knife

training at UVa, some from Japan, Brazil, Taiwan, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. Steiner, Kassell, and Sheehan also have helped to dramatically shape the field of stereotactic radiosurgery through numerous peer-reviewed publications, presentations, and research.

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