



Dr. Jamal Taha, medical director for the Gamma Knife Center at Kettering Medical Center, prepares brain cancer patient Jessie "Foy" McMaster for Gamma Knife surgery. Instead of a scalpel, the surgery uses 201 beams of precisely focused gamma radiation to shrink and reduce tumors. Contributed photo by Kettering Medical Center

Gamma Knife gives doctors the edge with brain surgery

By Anthony Gottschlich
Staff Writer

For Jessie "Foy" McMaster, his recurring struggle with cancer isn't just a battle, it's all-out war.

The 61-year-old Butler Twp. resident has a mighty weapon on his side, though, one with a success rate of better than 85 percent.

It's called the Gamma Knife, a means for brain surgery with no anesthesia, cutting or pain involved. Instead, the device focuses 201 beams of gamma radiation with pinpoint accuracy intended to halt tumor growth in areas doctors can't go to with conventional surgery.

Kettering Medical Center has used the Gamma Knife for more than nine years now, and it remains the only hospital in southwest Ohio to have the device. But with McMas-

ter, the hospital reached a milestone on Sept. 17 when it used the knife for the 1,000th time.

"When Foy's brain cancer progressed deep inside his brain, it made Gamma Knife the treatment of choice," said Dr. Jamal Taha, medical director for the hospital's Gamma Knife Center.

McMaster developed non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in 1988, possibly due to Agent Orange exposure in the Vietnam War, he said. He's had numerous tumors through the years, undergoing an aggressive regimen of chemotherapy and radiation at times.

He had whole brain radiation in 2004, then turned to Gamma Knife surgery in 2006. The outpatient procedure worked, so there's hope it will work this time on the three malignant tumors in his left temporal lobe.

He won't know the outcome

for a while, but he said he's already feeling stronger and more stable since last month's surgery.

"It's a miracle," he said. "I wish it was usable with other types of cancers or tissues."

Time will tell on that one, but Gamma Knife uses go beyond cancer, said Diane Kessack, a registered nurse and Gamma Knife coordinator. It can be used to treat a variety of brain disorders, including essential tremors, Parkinson's disease, obsessive-compulsive disorder and trigeminal neuralgia, a disabling facial pain.

The possibilities are many, Kessack said.

"In the next year and a half, you're going to see a very aggressive and very progressive use of Gamma Knife," she said.

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