



News Release

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Bosnian Teen Is First Local Pediatric Patient to Be Treated for Brain Tumor with Gamma Knife® at Baptist Cancer Institute

Jacksonville, Florida, May 24, 2006 – This spring, 15-year-old Aldijana Divovic – born in Sarajevo, Bosnia – was the first pediatric patient to be treated with the Gamma Knife® at Baptist Cancer Institute. Pediatric neurosurgeon, Hector James, MD, performed the procedure with neurosurgeon Arnold Zeal, MD, and radiation oncologist Abhijit Deshmukh, MD. Dr. James is chief of the Lucy Gooding Pediatric Neurosurgery Center at Wolfson Children’s Hospital and Dr. Zeal is medical director of the Gamma Knife Center at Baptist Cancer Institute.

Aldijana, now a sophomore at Wolfson High School, emigrated with her twin brother, Aldin, and their parents, Muhamed and Hajrija, from Bosnia to Germany in 1996 to escape the war in their country. In 1998, when Aldijana and Aldin were eight years old, the family immigrated to Jacksonville, Florida. Her uncle, Safet Susa, later joined them from Croatia.

Aldijana was getting good grades and enjoying life in her adopted country when she started to experience chronic headaches and double vision this past winter. “My eye wouldn’t move to the right,” she remembers. “My Dad took me to the eye doctor to get glasses and he sent me to an ophthalmologist. He did a CT scan and told me he found a tumor.”

In January, Aldijana was referred to Dr. James, who diagnosed her with a Schwannoma, a tumor of the tissue covering the nerves (called the nerve sheath). These tumors develop from a type of cell in the brain nerves called a Schwann cell.

“I just thought my vision was going bad,” says Aldijana. “I was shocked that it was a tumor. I cried so much because I thought I was going to die. Dr James told me everything was going to be OK.”

“In Aldijana’s case, the tumor was affecting her sixth nerve, causing weakness of eye movement,” says Dr. James. “Her eye was turning in instead of out, which produced double vision. Eventually, she would’ve experienced more eye weakness, more difficulty moving her eyes and one side of her face, and eventually, the face would have become numb and paralyzed. Finally, there was a risk of complete blockage of blood circulation in the area, which ultimately could’ve led to death.”

Aldijana's tumor was in a location that was very difficult to access surgically. "You could potentially cause a lot of damage to the surrounding structure," explains Dr. James. "There's also a high risk of death itself from bleeding, and taking the tumor out would take with it some normal nerves next to it, which could create many neurological handicaps."

In addition to surgery, Dr. James gave Aldijana and her parents two other options: wait and see, or Gamma Knife treatment, which had never been attempted on a pediatric patient in Jacksonville before.

A clinically proven technology that has brought great advances to the field of neurosurgery, the Gamma Knife is a device that precisely delivers high doses of radiation to tumors and lesions deep within the brain. Because of its targeting abilities, it is often used in areas that were previously considered inoperable.

Radiation is delivered by as many as 201 beams of cobalt-60 radiation that are programmed to pinpoint a tumor or abnormal blood vessel. Individually, the beams are weak and cannot damage healthy tissue, but together they converge precisely on the targeted area with a dose of radiation carefully calculated to reduce or eliminate diseased cells. The Gamma Knife is so accurate that it can treat an area the size of a pinpoint.

"Gamma sounded like the safest idea," says Aldijana. "I didn't want to have scars, lose my hair or have anything cut off." She was fortunate that Jacksonville has a Gamma Knife center. The nearest Gamma Knife centers are in Miami and Atlanta.

Following the Gamma procedure on March 21, 2006, which slowly eliminates the tumor, Aldijana was followed closely. A recent check-up by Dr. James has shown expected improvement. She no longer experiences headaches and is able to concentrate more. "I still see double, but it's getting better and my eye looks way better. Dr. James said it will get better over time. God was on my side."

Baptist Cancer Institute and Wolfson Children's Hospital physicians are excited about the prospect of offering an additional treatment option for children who are diagnosed with brain tumors. "We already have a few pediatric patients in mind who might benefit from the Gamma Knife procedure," said radiation oncologist Dr. Deshmukh. "These are children who have had radiation therapy previously and can't have additional conventional radiation therapy. The precision of the Gamma Knife allows us to retreat areas that have received full doses of conventional radiation therapy because we are able to target just the abnormal tissue and spare normal brain tissue while sparing the side effects. No other technique has that precision or ability."

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Baptist Health is a faith-based, mission-driven system comprised of Baptist Medical Center Downtown, Baptist Heart Hospital, Baptist Medical Center Beaches, Baptist Medical Center Nassau; Baptist Medical Center South and Wolfson Children's Hospital - Jacksonville's only children's hospital. Baptist Health also includes cardiology and cardiovascular surgery services, a comprehensive cancer center, orthopaedic institute, women's resource center, a full range of psychology and psychiatry services, outpatient facilities and a network of primary care physicians' offices throughout Northeast Florida. Baptist Health is the official healthcare provider for the Jacksonville Jaguars.

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