

Brain and Spine Tumor News

Making Cancer History®

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS
MD Anderson
Cancer Center

Our mission is to provide support and education to patients, families, caregivers and friends of individuals with brain and spine tumors.

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Efren Saldivar with Proton Therapy Center staff

February 2018

Clinical trials ... 2

New physicians ... 3

Cancer patients and the flu:
What you should know ... 3

Events

Brain Tumor Support Group - The Woodlands

A special edition of
MD Anderson BEST

Feb. 22, 2018
2 to 3:30 p.m.

[MD Anderson in The Woodlands](#)

CureFest

Music Festival

Saturday, March 24
Humble Civic Center
[curefest.com](#)

Run for the Rose

16th Annual Houston 5K

Sunday, April 8
NRG Park

[drmarnierose.org](#)

Spinal cord ependymoma survivor confronts fear

This story originally appeared on MD Anderson's [Cancerwise blog](#).

By Efren Saldivar

When I was undergoing radiation therapy for my spinal tumor, I took my 12-year-old brother to the MD Anderson Proton Therapy Center. He wanted to see the machine and was fascinated by the process.

On the drive home, he asked me, “Bubba, what’s the scariest thing you’ve ever done?”

I had to be honest with him: I told him it was the surgery I’d just gone through and proton therapy. It was really fear of the unknown. With cancer, I wasn’t in control, and I didn’t know what was going to happen.

My spinal cord ependymoma diagnosis

Let me rewind to where it all started: In October 2016, I flew to New York City for work. When I landed, I had some lower back pain, but I didn’t think anything of it. I went to my hotel, had dinner and went to sleep. Around 4 a.m., I woke up in a cold sweat with excruciating pain. At first, I thought I’d pinched a nerve and that it would go away. After an hour, I was still in pain and went to the ER, where I was diagnosed with a pulled back muscle.

Back home a few days later, I went to my primary care physician. An MRI revealed a 4-centimeter mass inside my spinal cord.

Continued on page 2

Clinical Trials

We have more than a dozen clinical trials available, including newly diagnosed and recurrent glioblastoma, meningioma, ependymoma and brain metastases. A few open trials are listed below.

See more trials, details and enrollment information:

[mdanderson.org/
neuroclinicaltrials](http://mdanderson.org/neuroclinicaltrials)

Study No. 2016-0867

Phase I/II

Treatment agent:

Atezolizumab

Newly diagnosed
glioblastoma

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Study No. 2016-0433

Phase II

Treatment agent:

Adenovirus (DNX-2401)

with Pembrolizumab

Recurrent glioblastoma

.....

Study No. 2016-0443

Phase II

Treatment agents: Laser
Interstitial Thermal Therapy
and Lomustine

Recurrent glioblastoma or
grade III IDH-wildtype
anaplastic astrocytoma

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Study No. ALLIANCE A221208

Phase II

Treatment agents:

Bevacizumab

Radionecrosis after
radiosurgery for brain
metastases

Spinal Cord Survivor

Continued from page 1

Everything around me stopped when I got that diagnosis. It felt as if my stomach, heart and mind had dropped out of my body. I immediately thought it was cancer and knew the road ahead was going to be a battle.

My first visit to MD Anderson



Efren and his mother at MD Anderson.

I was raised in Lake Jackson, just south of Houston, where everyone knows MD Anderson is the best place in the world for cancer treatment. I immediately called for an appointment. The next day I learned neurosurgeon Claudio Tatsui, M.D., had accepted my case and wanted to see me in MD Anderson's Brain and Spine Center ASAP.

After meeting Dr. Tatsui and his advanced practice nurse Marilou Oro, I felt relieved. My health and life were in the best possible hands.

I asked Dr. Tatsui about the potential outcomes, the recovery, the "what if" scenarios, the best case, the worst case and the alternatives. I think I asked every question in the book, and he answered every single one. The next week, I had test after test, MRIs, blood work and so on. I felt like a pincushion but knew it was worth it.

Get that bad boy out: My ependymoma surgery

My surgery was scheduled for Dec. 6, 2016. The night before, I tossed and turned, prayed, wrote letters to my family and counted down the minutes.

The surgery took eight hours. Dr. Tatsui successfully removed my spinal cord tumor, which turned out to be a grade I myxopapillary ependymoma.

When I woke up, I moved all my fingers and toes, thanked God and rejoiced for being alive, healthy, happy -- and a little loopy, thanks to the medicine. I stayed in the hospital to recover for about a week, and the staff provided the best possible customer and patient service I had ever experienced.

Phase II of my ependymoma treatment: proton therapy

Going into proton therapy, I didn't know what to think. I'd heard stories of people being tired or getting sick. My radiation oncologist Andrew Bishop, M.D., put together a 30-treatment plan (five days a week for six weeks) to kill off any remaining cancer cells.

My first day of proton therapy was Jan. 23, 2017. That's when radiation therapists Danna and Kristoffer stepped into my life. I was nervous, anxious and out of my comfort zone, but Danna and Kristoffer were rock stars. Once again I felt like I was in the right hands. Later I met Sally, Ashlee, Denice and Bette. Everyone on my team made me feel like I was family and that they were on this journey with me.

Thankfully, I did not experience any side effects. After finishing treatment, I was relieved and at peace. My first post-treatment scan was clear, with no evidence of disease.

Don't be afraid

So, back to my brother's original question: What's the scariest thing you've ever done? If I could go back today and talk to myself before surgery and treatment, I would say:

1. Don't be afraid. You're in the best place in the world with the brightest people in the world.
2. The people at MD Anderson are going to treat you like family. They will be with you every step of the way.
3. Have faith. Life is a journey, and not all things go according to plan.
4. Live life to the fullest. No matter the outcome, be happy and live life as if tomorrow will be your last day. Nothing is promised, and you should not take it for granted.

Welcome, new physicians!

The Brain and Spine Center is pleased to welcome neuro-oncologist Rebecca Harrison, M.D., and radiation oncologist Kristina Demas Woodhouse, M.D., to our team.



Dr. Harrison is returning to MD Anderson as an assistant professor, after completing her fellowship here in June. She earned her medical degree from Queens University Medical School in Canada and completed five years of neurology residency training. Dr. Harrison's areas of expertise include primary brain tumors and cancer neurology.



Dr. Woodhouse joined MD Anderson as an assistant professor, after completing her residency in Philadelphia and Gamma Knife training at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. She earned her medical degree from The George Washington University School of Medicine. Dr. Woodhouse's clinical and research interests include pediatric and adult brain tumors, proton therapy and stereotactic radiosurgery, as well as health disparities, quality improvement and patient safety.

Watch Chordoma Conference Videos



The [Chordoma Foundation](#) hosted a Chordoma Community Conference at MD Anderson in October 2017. If you were unable to attend, you can [watch the event videos online](#). Chordoma is a rare bone cancer that grows in the skull base and spine. Learn more in this [Chordoma Q&A](#) from Laurence Rhines, M.D., and Shaan Raza, M.D.

Cancer patients and the flu: What you should know

This story originally appeared in MD Anderson's [Cancerwise blog](#).

By Cynthia DeMarco

When it comes to contagious diseases like the flu, cancer patients are among those most vulnerable to infection. This year's flu season is shaping up to be one of the worst in more than a decade, with the Centers for Disease Control reporting "widespread" infection in 49 of the 50 United States.

Keep reading here to learn how to protect yourself: mdanderson.org/flu.

Find us online:

Digital Newsletter: www.mdanderson.org/neurosurgery



/MDAndersonBrainandSpine



@MDABrainSpine

MD Anderson BEST

A brain tumor support group

MD Anderson BEST (Brain tumor Education and Support Together) is a monthly education and support group for patients diagnosed with brain tumors. Each month features a different expert guest speaker, followed by a discussion/support group led by the Brain and Spine Center social work counselors.

Lunch and valet parking validation are provided at no cost to attendees.

MD Anderson BEST
Second Tuesday of each month
12 to 1:30 p.m.
Brain and Spine Center

Upcoming meetings and topics:

Feb. 13: Seizures

March 13: Clinical trials

April 10: Rehabilitative therapies

Follow the MD Anderson Brain and Spine Facebook page (facebook.com/MDAndersonBrainandSpine) for updates and event reminders about each meeting.

Pre-registration is appreciated, but walk-ins are also welcome. **Questions and registration:** Amy Sheehy, 713-563-7728

MD Anderson BEST

in your community

In 2018, we're launching quarterly BEST meetings in The Woodlands. Join us for the first event:

Thursday, Feb. 22

2 to 3:30 p.m.

MD Anderson in The Woodlands

17198 St. Luke's Way

Medical Arts Center I, Suite 130

Questions and registration:

Michelle Will, 936-446-5119