

Cancer Creates...

STRENGTH • COURAGE • HOPE



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PATIENT PERSPECTIVES

Staying Positive with a Metastatic Brain Lesion

By: Paula Courtney



Paula and Eddie Courtney

Most people who meet me never expect to hear that I spent several years fighting for my life. I'm sharing my story to alleviate some fears about Gamma Knife® surgery and to encourage others affected by cancer to continue to stay strong

during difficult times.

A few years ago, it was discovered that my previously treated lung cancer metastasized to my brain. One year after my lung cancer treatment, while at work, I felt a heaviness in my chest and uncontrollable shaking in my arms and legs. When I collapsed and I couldn't stand up, I knew something was wrong.

I was transported to The Valley Hospital, where I had not been treated for cancer previously, and received a CT scan of my head in the Emergency Department. The next day, Dr. D'Ambrosio viewed the results and identified an area of swelling in my brain. He explained that he could definitely see a mass in the swelling and that it was very likely a metastatic lesion, a new tumor formed by cancer cells that spread from an original tumor.

Four days later, I underwent a successful brain surgery called

a craniotomy to remove the mass, which was performed by Dr. D'Ambrosio. I was absolutely terrified of the craniotomy procedure, but Dr. Ambrosio explained everything so thoroughly and calmed all my fears.

Two weeks later, I underwent Gamma Knife radiosurgery, a type of radiation treatment, in order to ensure that any remaining cells from where the tumor was removed were treated. I thought it was going to be surgery, but surprisingly to me, it wasn't. I was so relaxed during the procedure and didn't feel a thing. My treatment was completed in about an hour and I returned home later that evening.

Looking back, as easy as the Gamma Knife treatment was, what helped me cope with my diagnosis the most was staying positive. It's good to keep up with your normal life and activities however you can, even if modifications have to be made to prioritize your health. Also, be sure to make time for your family and friends. My family and friends provided me with extra courage and stayed positive when I didn't have the emotional strength to do so.

Three years later, I continue to be cancer-free with follow-up scans every three months. The team at the Valley Gamma Knife Center was just amazing in the way that they explained the procedure and calmed my fears. Most importantly, there are no words to express my gratitude to Dr. D'Ambrosio for his skill and compassion throughout my journey.

INSPIRATION

"The only courage that matters is the kind that gets you from one moment to the next." – Mignon McLaughlin



COMPREHENSIVE CANCER CARE

INTEGRATIVE HEALING

The Practice of Meditation

By: Janet Hamill, BSN, RN, HNB-BC, Integrative Healing Practitioner

It is often hard, especially in healing or living with an illness, to follow someone's advice telling you to "relax" or "calm down." Often, we are overwhelmed with too much information in a time of cancer diagnosis, let alone from news and technology in our daily lives. Meditation can calm and train the mind to lessen distractions and become more focused, patient, and happy.

Used throughout the world, meditation is a practice of focusing your attention and increasing your concentration to become more aware. This mostly solitary practice requires a calm, quiet environment; being in a comfortable position; and having an open and receptive mind. It uses repeated words and sounds and concentration on the breath help attain calmness of our thoughts. Continued practice of meditation can bring positive thoughts and inner peace to light.

Finding meditation strategies that you are comfortable with can help you attain mental and emotional relief. Some forms of meditation you can begin to explore include:

- Mindfulness
- Guided Imagery
- Moving Meditation: Walking/Gentle Yoga
- Loving-kindness
- Transcendental meditation
- Centering prayer/Contemplation

To learn more about meditation, go to <https://www.mindful.org/meditation/mindfulness-getting-started/>. You can also find meditations on the smartphone app "Calm" or by searching videos and podcasts on YouTube or iTunes.

EVENTS

Visualization/Guided Imagery Class

When: Every Wednesday from 10:30 to 11 a.m.

*Where: Luckow Pavilion, 2nd Floor Conference Room
1 Valley Health Plaza, Paramus*

Visualization and guided imagery can help tap into inner strengths and other qualities that can empower individuals to cope with life stressors. Participants are led through guided imagery and relaxation techniques and are surrounded by sounds of soothing music. An individual can learn to relax and work toward reducing, modifying, and/or eliminating pain and other symptoms. If attending for the first time, please notify us by calling 201-634-5787. There is no fee to participate.

PATIENT RESOURCES

Consumer Health Information Ambassador Program

We are here to help you.

Do you have health questions that concern yourself, a family member, or a friend? Do you want to learn more about a health-related condition? If so, Valley's Consumer Health Information Ambassador Program is ready to help you find the most reliable and accurate medical information.

If you would like assistance with obtaining health information, you may call the department at 201-446-8285 (fax: 201-447-8602) or email a request for information to calocc@valleyhealth.com. You may also want to stop by the Volunteer Desk located on the second floor of the Luckow Pavilion in the main corridor of the patient resource area. If you plan on visiting in-person, please check scheduled availability to coordinate your visit.

Once a request is received and clarified, the library's trained staff will complete a comprehensive literature search and select and photocopy all relevant information. A packet of this information will then be sent to the person who has made the request. The Consumer Health Information Ambassador Program is available to all members of our community. Services are both confidential and free of charge.

Build Strength and Endurance at Valley Health LifeStyles Fitness Center

Valley Health *LifeStyles* is our very own world-class fitness center! More than just your average gym, *LifeStyles* is medically supervised and has trained staff to can assist with your physical exercise regimen. Depending on the diagnosis, joining *LifeStyles* may be an excellent option for cancer patients who are looking to better manage their symptoms and to reduce the risk of further illness.

Valley Health *LifeStyles* has something for every age and fitness level. It is located at Valley's Center for Health and Wellness at 1400 MacArthur Blvd. in Mahwah, NJ. To learn more about *LifeStyles* membership, please visit ValleyHealthLifeStyles.com or call 201-389-0839.

There's More Online

Visit ValleyHealth.com/Cancer to:

- Learn more about Valley-Mount Sinai cancer services
- View upcoming events, classes and support groups
- Read more issues of *Cancer Creates*

Share Your Story with Us!

Have an inspiring story or helpful tip to share? Please contact Joy Dolan, Communications & Marketing Associate for Valley Health System, at 201-291-6392 or jdolan@valleyhealth.com.