

AN UPDATE ON GAMMA KNIFE



PATIENT STORIES



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appointment call
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Macquarie University Hospital owns Australia's first Gamma Knife. Gamma Knife radiosurgery is a well-established, precise, powerful and proven method to treat selective conditions in the brain.

It offers a safe and effective treatment for approximately 75,000 patients worldwide each year, for malignant and benign brain tumours, vascular abnormalities and functional disorders.

Macquarie University Hospital Gamma Knife service provides a collaborative multi-disciplinary team (MDT) approach. The MDT consists of representatives from Neurosurgery, Radiation Oncology, Nursing, Radiation Therapy and Medical Physics. The MDT holds regular meetings at which every case referred is discussed before treatment is approved. All possible treatment options are explored in this meeting to ensure that only patients who are suitable for treatment are accepted. Your referring doctor can participate in and be informed of decisions made by the MDT.

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GAMMA KNIFE TREATMENT FOR KATHRYN PRYCE >

GAMMA KNIFE TREATMENT FOR KATHRYN PRYCE



KATHRYN PRYCE HAS HAD MULTIPLE GAMMA KNIFE TREATMENTS FOR BRAIN METASTASES, WITH RECENT SCANS SHOWING ALL NINE TUMOURS HAVE EITHER REDUCED IN SIZE OR DISAPPEARED, LEAVING ONLY SCAR TISSUE.

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Two years ago, Canberra-resident Kathryn Pryce was diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma. At the time, she had a kidney removed. Seven months later, she experienced a dizzy spell at work and doctors found a single metastasis to the brain.

“That was when I was fortunate to be admitted under the care Dr John Fuller at Canberra Hospital,” said Kathryn. “He looked at my brain scans and saw that I would be a candidate for Gamma Knife surgery.”

Kathryn had her first Gamma Knife treatment in 2014 and, since then, has had five treatments for a total of nine tumours that have developed over time.

“We chose this treatment because it had relatively few side-effects compared with whole brain radiation,” said Kathryn. “I am an active person and if I had chosen whole brain radiation, due to the high doses of radiation incurred, I would probably have experienced cognitive impairment and memory loss within a year of this treatment.”

Gamma Knife technology is now well established as a highly targeted and effective treatment with virtually no side effects. It delivers radiotherapy from 192 sources that in total will shoot in excess of 7000 beams of radiation. These converge with high accuracy on

the target area inside the brain. Each individual beam has low intensity and therefore does not affect the tissue that it passes through on its way to the affected area.

Macquarie University Hospital was the first hospital in Australia to bring the treatment to Australia from overseas, with Dr John Fuller the first specialist trained in using the technology. The Hospital has since supported the overseas training of several more of its doctors in using the technology.

“The treatment itself was relatively painless,” said Kathryn. “I had a mild headache from where the head brace was fitted and had a sense of lethargy directly after the procedure. However, the following day, I felt reasonably fine and should I have needed to, I could have returned to work.”

“During the treatments, I’ve continued to work, play sport and look after my grandchildren. Gamma Knife has ensured my quality of life over this last year.”

Recent scans show that all tumours are shrinking or just scar tissue.

“Rather than invasive surgery to remove Kathryn’s cerebral metastasis, Gamma Knife surgery was an effective treatment with minimal disruption

to her daily life, which is important in regards to maintaining quality of life,” said Dr Fuller. “Although she has developed new lesions, given this technology, she has been able to have these also treated effectively without open operations. This is the stand-out benefit of the Gamma Knife approach – the ability to treat numerous recurrences whilst maintaining quality of life and minimising the effects of treatment.”

“It’s been the right choice for me,” added Kathryn. “With all the uncertainty that comes with having a stage-four cancer and not knowing so much about what will eventuate, the Gamma Knife is the one thing I know I can do that’s working.”

“And the whole experience has been quite easy. The wonderful staff and the minimal side-effects have helped to make this the easiest part of my journey.”



Macquarie University Hospital’s Gamma Knife Access Fund

Macquarie University Hospital has a Gamma Knife Access Fund, established in 2015 through a generous gift from Doug Thompson. The access fund is aimed at enhancing access to the leading technology.

Doug Thompson made the donation after his wife Monique was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1998. She was treated at the time and had been in remission until last year, when doctors found four brain metastases. Doug and Monique opted for Gamma Knife surgery as Monique’s form of treatment. Monique had one treatment and was due to have another. Tragically, before having her second treatment, she died from other secondary tumours around her body.

The positive experience that Monique did have with her single Gamma Knife treatment and the tragic loss of his beloved wife led Doug to establish a Gamma Knife Access Fund at Macquarie University Hospital. His primary motivation was the high cost of the treatment – in the order of \$25,000, with patients only receiving a rebate of around \$1,900. One aspect of the fund is to raise the number of children and young people receiving treatment.