

ENHANCING PATIENT COMFORT DURING TREATMENT FOR BRAIN TUMORS

Stereotactic radiosurgery (SRS) is a highly accurate form of radiation therapy used to treat brain tumors and cancer that has spread to the brain from other parts of the body. Traditionally, a major downside of SRS was that the treatment can be difficult for patients. Because the head must be kept perfectly still during treatment for precise targeting of the tumor, most medical centers require patients to wear uncomfortable head frames secured with screws.

Recently, Lutheran Medical Center became the first hospital in Brooklyn and the second in New York City to use a new frameless system for immobilizing the head without sacrificing the quality of treatment. A customized mouthpiece is gently vacuum-sealed to the roof of the patient's mouth to keep the head still in a noninvasive way.

Special markers, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and sophisticated computer software help doctors plan the delivery of tightly focused high-dose radiation to destroy cancer cells. The frameless SRS system can treat benign and malignant brain tumors as well as head and neck cancer.

"This fixation technique is completely noninvasive while enabling us to



perform radiation therapy with pinpoint precision," says **Audrey Saitta, M.D.**, senior vice president and chair of Radiation Oncology at Lutheran. "The system we use doesn't require patients to clench down on awkward bite blocks, which can raise accuracy issues if the patient moves. Our frameless SRS system is just as accurate as other techniques and a lot more comfortable."

Also, patients undergoing frameless SRS spend less time at the hospital during

pretreatment planning, Dr. Saitta says. One reason is they don't need to be fitted for an invasive head frame, which requires local anesthesia.

"At Lutheran, we are continually searching for ways to make treatment less invasive for patients while maintaining the same high quality," Dr. Saitta says. "Frameless SRS is a great example of that. The ease and comfort it offers patients is just wonderful."