

ONE PATIENT

TALKS ABOUT
HER RECOVERY,
SURVIVAL

Overcoming Brain Cancer

In December 2010, Arianne Baker woke one morning with a splitting headache. She took a sick day off work and went to lie down. She slept for a total of 19 hours.

“I was going through a lot of stress at the time,” says Baker, a 29-year-old preschool teacher from Marshall, Mich. “My doctor diagnosed it as depression. But after another month of headaches, disorientation and sleepiness, I knew something wasn’t right.”

A subsequent MRI showed Baker had a tumor in both the left and right frontal lobes of her brain. She visited the Karmanos Cancer Center in January 2011 and met with neurosurgeon Sandeep Mittal, M.D., co-leader of the Neuro-Oncology Multidisciplinary Team.

Because brain cancer can be difficult to detect at an early stage, it’s not unusual for patients like Baker to receive an incorrect initial diagnosis, Dr. Mittal says.

“With any brain lesion, the symptoms depend on the location of the mass,” he says. “If the tumor is at the area of the brain that controls speech, a person can have difficulty with language function. A tumor near the motor or sensory cortex can cause weakness, numbness or tingling. A person may have difficulty walking or may have balance problems. A tumor

can also cause pressure in the brain, leading to significant headaches, nausea, vomiting and double vision.

Sometimes patients with lesions have no neurological symptoms until the tumor becomes very large.”

Depending on the tumor’s location, size and growth rate, treatment typically involves surgery followed by radiation and chemotherapy.

“Better outcomes relate to the extent that the tumor can be removed,” he says. “For patients with malignant brain tumors, we now frequently see them doing well two or three years after surgery. Despite their aggressiveness, brain cancer is survivable. Arianne Baker is proof of that.”

At Karmanos, Dr. Mittal and his colleagues utilize advanced MRI techniques using a high-resolution 3T scanner as well as specialized surgical equipment and techniques (such as Brainlab neuronavigation and brain mapping while the patient is awake), which help surgeons perform more accurate surgery to reduce side effects.

Dr. Mittal performed two surgeries in February 2011 to remove Baker’s brain tumors. During her second surgery, which included removing the tumor involving the speech and motor parts of the brain, she experienced slower motor functioning and difficulty speaking for 17 days. But, as expected, after extensive physical rehabilitation and speech therapy, she regained her speech and strength, returned to work, and is living normally. Best of all – she’s cancer-free.

“I feel great and am more active than ever,” Baker says. “I was very determined to make a full recovery. I’m so glad I was persistent with getting the right diagnosis. As a patient, I knew myself best and it was that persistence that made the difference. My family, my faith and the care I received at Karmanos helped me overcome cancer.”



ARIANNE BAKER
AND HER NIECE
ABIGAIL



CONTACT US

For more information about a cancer diagnosis or treatment, call **1-800-KARMANOS** (1-800-527-6266) or visit karmanos.org.