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Suicide attempt leads to mother's brain cancer diagnosis

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BALTIMORE (WMAR) - A Jessup mother feels almost back to normal after beating cancer with proton therapy. But she didn't learn about the diagnosis, until it was almost too late.

"I feel horrible. I just don't even want to exist right now," Mary Alston said.

That's what she told her doctor, after her depression started to worsen. Her doctor changed her medication and even increased the dosage, but nothing helped. She decided to take her own life on Christmas eve.

"I was just like nobody should have to put up with this then and that's when I decided I was going to take some pills," Alston said.

She took a bunch of sleeping pills and drove to a Park & Ride.

"Just sit down in my car, lean the seat back, listen to the music and just go to sleep," Alston said.

That was her plan, but that's not what happened.

"I heard a tap, tap, tap on the window and it was a police officer," Alston said.

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She woke up the day after Christmas and found out she had brain cancer because a doctor did a CT scan.

"All the people that I've talked to have told me that there was no protocol to run a CT or MRI on my head and for whatever reason, Dr. Shack at Howard County literally saved my life by doing what she did," Alston said.

At the time, doctors told her it was stage one. She was in surgery the next day to remove the tumor. With its location, she said it all made sense: her depression and mood swings. A few weeks after the surgery, she found out her tumor had been upgraded to stage two, meaning radiation. She knew right away that she wanted proton therapy, a very precise form of radiation.

"When you deliver a proton beam, you can pick where the tumor is and it will deliver all of that dose and there will be no spread of the dose beyond the tumor," executive director of the [Maryland Proton Treatment Center](#), Dr. Bill Regine, said. "Having a tool like protons, where you can put the dose in and not spread it to other parts of the brain, is extremely powerful."

Regine says the center in Baltimore is the only one of its kind in the region. Open for just two years, he says it's the largest and fastest-growing center in the country.

"The most exciting thing is that we can impact the lives of cancer patients in a way we couldn't before," Regine said.

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