



## Troy — Glioblastoma Multiforme Patient Story

### The Challenge

As a financial advisor who specializes in college planning, and has a popular blog with hundreds of thousands of readers, Troy works hard to help families reduce the cost of college and pay for it as strategically as possible. With such an enormous responsibility to his clients and readers, Troy must be mentally sharp.

But in August 2016, Troy started to experience frequent severe headaches and abrupt mood changes. Two days after celebrating his 15th wedding anniversary with his wife, Heidi, Troy woke up with excruciating head pain and severe vomiting similar to when he previously experienced a [cerebrospinal fluid \(CSF\) leak](#). A CSF leak occurs when the protective fluid around the brain leaks through the skull bone.

### The Path to UPMC

Heidi rushed Troy to their local emergency room in Warren, Pa. where the doctors did a CT scan. The scan clearly showed the problem: a large lesion in the right parietal lobe of his brain. Troy was immediately taken by ambulance three hours away to UPMC Presbyterian in Pittsburgh. The neurosurgeons at UPMC are some of the most experienced experts in the treatment of brain tumors, particularly in that specific area of the brain.

After further testing and evaluations, Troy was diagnosed with stage four [glioblastoma multiforme](#) (GBM 4), the most aggressive type of primary brain cancer — and the hardest type to treat. The location of the tumor, in the insula of the brain, is sometimes considered inoperable. But when Troy heard the word “cancer,” he remained positive.

“Fortunately, there wasn’t much time to wait around for the surgery, which is a recipe for worry and stress. I was in surgery

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within two days and I was looking forward to getting it done,” Troy says.

## The Solution

Fifteen family members, pastors, and friends came to support Troy and anxiously camped out in the waiting room. Once Troy was under anesthesia, UPMC neurosurgeon [Mark Richardson, MD, PhD](#) and his team performed a craniotomy, a surgery in which a portion of the skull is temporarily opened, and removed the entire fist-sized tumor. The complex surgery took more than 11 hours, because the tumor was wrapped around one of the largest arteries in the brain, the middle cerebral artery.

“It was two or three in the morning when the doctors came to see us. Dr. Richardson told us that the surgery couldn’t have gone better,” says Heidi. “When we thanked him, he said he does this work for moments like these.”

Troy stayed in the hospital for a week after surgery. During Troy’s hospital stay, Heidi and one of their nephews were grabbing a coffee when Dr. Richardson spotted them.

“He was in scrubs after another long surgery but he took the time to sit down, have a coffee with us, and check in. He was so down-to-earth and humble. That stuck with us,” Heidi says.

## The Results

Troy continued his recovery at home and had regular home care each week with a nurse, physical therapist, and occupational therapist. He also took steroids and underwent chemotherapy and radiation to continue to fight the cancer. A year later, his CT scans were clean and he is off the powerful steroids.

While Troy has good days and bad days, he never lost his positive attitude, perseverance, or faith. Heidi says most people don’t even realize he has brain cancer or had such a major surgery.

“One of my close friends passed away from the same type of cancer about a year before I was diagnosed,” says Troy. “So, each day is a gift and by the grace of God, I am here, recovering, working, and very happy with my progress. I could not have had better professional care than what I and my whole family received from the team of doctors, nurses, and other caregivers.”

“Dr. Richardson and his whole team were so attentive, caring, and helpful. They really exceeded our expectations,” he adds. “UPMC didn’t just save my life, they gave me a life I can make the most of. It is a struggle but every day I have the opportunity to choose to make the most of it.”

*Our patient stories profile a number of patients who have had brain surgery at UPMC. Although everyone's care experience is unique, we hope that sharing these stories will help other prospective patients and their families better understand these procedures and their potential benefits.*

*Troy's treatment and results may not be representative of all similar cases.*

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