



Brain tumor survivor Lindsay Susskind, pictured here with fiancé Jose Martinez.

Brain tumor survivor is celebrating six years and counting thanks to Hoag

For Lindsay Susskind, life is good. Wearing a bright sundress and a sunny smile, Lindsay's excitement towards life shows as she talks about her recent engagement.

Meeting Lindsay you'd never know she'd been treated for glioblastoma multiforme, the most aggressive type of brain tumor, that has an average survival rate of 14 months from diagnosis.

Six years ago, at the age of 24, Lindsay suddenly had a seizure and woke up in the hospital. Soon after physicians told her she had a brain tumor, she underwent an operation to remove part of the tumor. Familiar with Hoag's reputation for exceptional care, Lindsay

decided to receive all future treatment at Hoag to remove the rest of her tumor and to receive follow up treatment.

"I just feel the care here is amazing," says Lindsay of her decision to seek treatment at Hoag.

Pushing boundaries into the 'leading edge'

Christopher Duma, M.D., F.A.C.S., director of Hoag's Brain Tumor Program, treated Lindsay with a non-invasive technique developed at Hoag, called Gamma Knife Leading Edge Radiosurgery.

Developed by Dr. Duma, the technique is designed to halt the spread of malignant gliomas (a category of brain and spinal cord tumors that come from glial cells, the main brain cells that can develop into cancer).

Gamma Knife Leading Edge combines the functionality of the Gamma Knife with the advances in diagnostic radiology technology to map the shape and location of the brain tumor in order to administer a tightly focused dose of radiation to the tumor and its edges to stop and/or reduce the growth of abnormal tissue. Patients experience no incision or significant pain, and have a brief recovery period thanks to this advanced outpatient procedure.

Hoag Gamma Knife Center is the only facility in Orange County providing this treatment option for patients with brain disease. Traditional radiosurgical techniques have focused solely on the tumor bulk itself, while Hoag's advanced 'leading edge' technique specifically targets the radiation beyond the

local tumor volume to include the potential malignant tumor path. Prior to this technique, it was impossible to detect where the tumor might spread.

"I am convinced that is why Lindsay is still alive today," affirms Dr. Duma. "We've come a long way with this disease by using the leading edge technique."

Now a survivor of six years, Lindsay is looking forward to the future and planning a spring wedding a year from now, "We're really excited because everything is coming together!" beams Lindsay.

Meeting of the minds

Hoag provides a unique multidisciplinary approach to brain tumor treatment that includes advanced diagnostic technology and expertise in guiding microscopic, 3D image-guided surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and also the Gamma Knife *Perfexion*®. The Gamma Knife *Perfexion*® represents the most technologically advanced radiosurgical tool available. In a collaborative environment, Hoag's monthly tumor board brings together neurosurgeons, radiation oncologists, neurologists and other healthcare professionals to discuss patient cases and determine the best approach for that individual.

"It's a team approach at Hoag," says Brian Kim, M.D., radiation oncologist, Hoag Radiation Oncology and Gamma Knife Department. "Each patient has a full panel of experts collaborating on the best possible course of treatment as well as a nurse navigator, to guide them through the troubled waters of such a diagnosis and its management."

Credited to a culmination of state-of-the-art technology and multidisciplinary and multimodal approach to care, the median and overall survival rates for glioma patients at Hoag far exceed national averages. Twenty percent of patients live three or more years, which compares to a mere five percent

nationally. Hoag treats the most brain tumor cases south of Los Angeles and has treated more than 200 brain tumors without surgery, using the Gamma Knife alone.

Navigating the road to recovery

Hoag's Brain Tumor Program reaches beyond treating the tumor alone and extends to nurture the healing process. The brain tumor clinical nurse navigator guides a patient through each step of the way.

"It's difficult to have a diagnosis and not know where to go with it," says Lori Berberet, R.N., brain tumor clinical nurse navigator at Hoag and oncology nurse of 30 years. Lori not only orients a patient before treatment, providing patient education and emotional support through the diagnosis, but also follows them post-procedure to connect them with Hoag support services as well as community resources.

Dealing with the aftermath of a diagnosis is overwhelming for the entire family. Lori ensures patients and their families receive the support needed for their individual circumstances, such as counseling and even transportation, to ensure they get to their treatment and follow-up appointments. Hoag also provides a brain tumor support group open to both patients and their families.

"I help connect the dots to Hoag resources to make sure people get what they need, even if it's ultimately palliative care," explains Lori. "I'm so lucky to do this job. I can't change a person's diagnosis, but I can make them and their family much more comfortable through their cancer journey."

"First and foremost, Lori is amazing," attests Lindsay. "Lori has helped me to align with Hoag experts to best manage my care and keep me at 100 percent!"

Despite everything they've been through, Lindsay's family remains strong and has seized new opportunities out of their experiences. Inspired to help others, Lindsay's sister is

studying to become a nurse. "She sees what Hoag has done and I know that has had a big impact on her decision," says Lindsay.

Inspired by Lori and strengthened by the support group, Lindsay is working with Lori and Dr. Duma to reach out to other brain tumor patients and be an example that, with the right treatment, there is hope.

For more information on Hoag's Brain Tumor Program, visit hoag.org/neurosciences, or call 949/764-5938. ■

Hoag Epilepsy Center offers comprehensive epilepsy services in Orange County

Epilepsy is a medical condition that produces recurrent seizures affecting a variety of mental and physical functions. Epilepsy affects over three million Americans of all ages.

Hoag Epilepsy Center is designated as one of only a few Fourth-Level centers serving as a regional referral facility for medication-resistant epilepsy patients. Hoag's multidisciplinary team provides a collaboration of specialized neurosurgeons, neurologists, neuropsychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, and neurodiagnostic technologists to offer comprehensive diagnostic and treatment services to help patients attain the ultimate goal of seizure freedom.

The epilepsy monitoring unit has three dedicated patient rooms, all with ocean views, housing continuous electroencephalogram (EEG) recording for continuous brainwave data collection synchronized with two video cameras. This inpatient facility serves as a safe environment to conduct comprehensive evaluations as well as safe analysis of seizure medication in high-risk patients.

For more information call 949/764-6066.