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Community Voices



Edward Cerninka of Avondale was the first to undergo brain surgery with the new technology. Less than 24 hours after surgery, he was sitting up.

ABRAZO HEALTH

New brain-surgery tool can go deeper, safer

Submitted by Lori Baker, Abrazo Health communications specialist.

Less than 24 hours after undergoing brain surgery, Edward Cerninka was sitting up and chatting with his wife and parents in his room at Abrazo Health's Phoenix Baptist Hospital.

He was well enough to return to his Avondale home two days after having a brain tumor removed. Cerninka is the first patient to use Phoenix Baptist Hospital's new NICO BrainPath technology.

When he first discovered he had a brain tumor, Cerninka was worried about the risks of surgery, such as losing his speech, paralysis or other major neurological problems. These are risks of traditional brain surgery involving deep brain tumors when brain fibers cannot be seen.

He sought a second opinion from neurosurgeon Marco Marsella at Phoenix Baptist Hospital. Marsella is trained on the new surgical tool, the BrainPath.

"BrainPath is a new technology and I felt confident that giving it a try was the right thing to do. We're all here right now and we're happy. It was a miracle surgery. I can't believe the size of the tumor that was in my head," Cerninka said as he held up a pink golf ball to show how big his tumor was.

The BrainPath allows surgeons to maneuver through the brain with better accuracy and clarity. The only signs of Cerninka's surgery are a few butterfly bandages covering a small incision over his left ear.

"I'm a little sore from the procedure but I know that will go away in a few days," Cerninka said.

Marsella explained that the new BrainPath technology includes a special MRI that shows millions of white matter

brain fibers in several colors where a neurosurgeon only sees "a white magma" in the brain. The BrainPath tool helps to insert a 1.3-centimeter diameter plastic port so Marsella could safely push aside Cerninka's healthy brain tissue instead of cutting through it.

"With this technology we may approach tumors that were considered hard to remove or whose resection would pose a high intraoperative risk," Marsella said. "Benefits of this device include safer surgery, that usually provides faster recovery time, minimal internal and external scarring, less trauma to the brain and nerves, fewer side effects and complications post-surgery."

Cerninka, 50, said this was his first surgery. He found out he had a brain tumor when he was driving on Interstate 10 through Avondale on his way to a house-painting job when he felt a strange sensation.

"Everything seemed like it was going in slow motion and I felt like I was driving 20 miles an hour but I looked at my speedometer and I was going 60 miles an hour. I was unable to speak or text. But it went away shortly after I pulled off the freeway," Cerninka said.

He had a scheduled appointment that afternoon with a dermatologist and he brought up the incident. He was immediately referred to have an MRI and CT scan and was told he had a brain tumor.

Phoenix Baptist Hospital offers a spectrum of neurological and neurosurgical services. In January 2014, Phoenix Baptist Hospital opened its new neuroscience expansion suite with a Biplane Neuroangiography System, which allows surgeons to deliver care to patients with enhanced visualizations of the brain and spine.