

SEEK OUT THE BEST MEDICAL TEAM

My nightmare began in December 1996 when I was diagnosed with a 3.2 cm tumor. I opted for fractionated radiosurgery that failed. I then had no choice but to have the dreaded microsurgery. I researched more than a dozen doctors and hospitals and then made the decision to fly to California. It was one of the best decisions of my life!

Sadly, I have talked to many post-op patients who have had serious complications because they failed to seek out a center of expertise. One of those patients had the misfortune of being convinced that the surgery was not a big deal and that his hometown doctors could easily remove the tumor. He has had a total of four surgeries (three of which were to repair the damage done during the first surgery). He has numerous problems as a result and is unable to work and is now on Social Security Disability Insurance. He is only one of many patients who have gotten into trouble. I hear from patients like him on a regular basis since I am on the "Willing to Talk" (WTT) list distributed through Acoustic Neuroma Association (WTT list includes ANA members who have agreed to share their AN experience with other AN patients).

We read and hear about those, like myself, who breezed through the surgery, but it's the failures that concern me the most. Practice makes perfect – something every patient should keep in mind when selecting a neurosurgeon because there is no turning back once the damage is done,

Outcomes are different when you compare a surgeon who removed 10 acoustic tumors or less each year and a surgeon who removes 100 or more. If you have to leave your immediate area and go where you can get the best, most highly skilled doctors, GO! It might be an inconvenience, but you owe it to yourself to find the right people for the job or you could face a life of disfigurement and disability.

I've made my living as a motivational speaker and writer for almost 18 years. I could not afford to have my face and my life ruined, nor can you. I encourage everyone to become the captain of their healthcare team, and not settle for less than the best doctors, hospital, and over-all care. My second cousin and I, who also had AN surgery in August 2000, would like nothing more than to see this tumor wiped out of existence. However, until that happens, those who have surgery, whether radiosurgery or microsurgery, need to seek out the experts and feel confident in what they are being told.

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