

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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## UT SOUTHWESTERN OFFERS HIGH-TECH TREATMENT TO BABIES WHO WOULD OTHERWISE DIE FROM BRAIN TUMORS

DALLAS – May 22, 2002 – When 10-month-old O’Neal Scrivner stopped using her left arm, her parents worried she might have injured it. They never guessed their firstborn’s brain was being ravaged by a rare, almost-always fatal, cancerous tumor.

O’Neal’s rhabdoid tumor, aggressive and malignant, grew so quickly that within a month she not only stopped using her left arm but stopped crawling and learning new things.

But after receiving their doctor’s devastating diagnosis, O’Neal’s parents, Jennifer and Joel Scrivner, found hope at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, where doctors are using a device to deliver high-beam radiation therapy on infants and small children for the first time. O’Neal, who was treated April 2, was only the second baby ever treated with the Accuray technology.

“We were totally caught off guard,” Joel Scrivner said. “To look at her, she’s perfect. We just couldn’t believe something so horrible was happening.”

Jennifer Scrivner said, “As parents, we were helpless. You never think this could happen.”

Surgery removed the majority of little O’Neal’s tumor, but surgeons could not remove all of it. Tumor that remains can rapidly grow back, taking over and destroying the brain.

“This is a dangerous tumor,” said Dr. Cole Giller, UT Southwestern associate professor of neurological surgery and a physician pioneering this treatment in babies. “It grows back quickly, and no one has survived beyond two or three years.”

With the device, doctors are able to target radiation at remaining tumor cells, hopefully destroying any remnants of the tumor and increasing the chances of a full recovery. Until now, babies have not been able to undergo radiation therapy for brain cancers because their fragile brains are easily damaged by radiation. But with directed, high-beam radiation like this, only the cancerous part of the brain is exposed to radiation. The radiation machine moves like a large

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robot around the patient, sending beams of radiation from different angles for two hours, but it spares healthy brain tissue not in its path.

This device is also unique because it does not require patients to be fitted with a surgical “halo,” which locks their head into place during treatment and is too risky for the fragile skulls of infants like O’Neal. The machine takes constant X-ray images of the brain while delivering radiation, allowing the patient limited movement.

Because this treatment had only been used on older children and adults, radiation technicians had to fashion a special bed for the two babies they have treated. After the treatment, O’Neal returned home with her parents, where she is on oral chemotherapy. Her brain will be scanned monthly to determine if the tumor returns.

“There is a whole group of kids who can now get radiation where they couldn’t before,” Giller said. “Radiation can be a life-prolonging or even lifesaving treatment, which is important to parents and their children with brain tumors. The impact, I’m hopeful, will be tremendous.”

O’Neal’s parents, who live in Carrollton, are grateful and hoping for the best. “Medically, this procedure was our only hope,” Joel Scrivner said. “We felt like we had to try it.”

For now, the Scrivners are looking forward with faith. O’Neal is smiling, laughing, petting the family dog and working on taking her first steps.

“She was back on track the night after the procedure,” Joel Scrivner said. “She’s our little history-maker. We’re hoping and praying for a total cure.”

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