

Sylvester Neurosurgeon Removes Patient's Brain Tumor Using COVID-19 Safety Precautions

Last December, Beth Laggan realized that something was wrong with her husband Richard. "He started acting differently and was fatigued all the time, sometimes sleeping until after noon," she said. As Richard's symptoms worsened, she went to several doctors in South Florida who prescribed heart medications and hormonal treatments for the 58-year-old Coral Springs resident.



Richard and Beth Laggan.

Richard Laggan was then taken to Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center at the University Miami Miller School of

Medicine, where an MRI scan in March revealed a large malignant tumor in the frontal lobe of Richard's brain. At that point, he was referred to Ricardo J. Komotar, M.D., a top neurosurgeon in Florida, and director of the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center [Brain Tumor Initiative](#), which provides patients who have benign and malignant tumors with personalized care, access to clinical trials, leading-edge medical and radiation treatments, and minimally invasive surgical techniques that enhance outcomes.

Dr. Komotar, who is also director of surgical neuro-oncology, evaluated the brain scans, which showed the tumor had grown to 5.5 centimeters (2.1 inches) in size. He talked with the Laggans during an April 13 telehealth consultation, as regular office visits had been suspended to protect patients and physicians from a potential coronavirus infection.

Three days later, Richard was admitted for surgery at UHealth Tower, the health system's flagship hospital.

"It was difficult for me to drop him off for brain surgery and not be able to go into the hospital," Beth Laggan said. "But I understand the need for protocols that limit visitation."

To address COVID-19 safety concerns, the University of Miami Health System is taking the necessary precautions for patients to receive care in a safe environment. Patients are also COVID-tested prior to coming in for any procedure or surgery. Examination rooms are carefully disinfected, and doctors and nurses wear personal protective equipment such as goggles, gloves, and face masks. Non-COVID-19 patients are kept in areas separate from COVID-19 patients, and anyone suspected of having is treated in an isolated area.

Performing the Surgery

The next day, Dr. Komotar performed an awake tumor removal with intensive language and motor mapping to ensure an aggressive resection that maintains neurological functional and quality of life.

“Because the tumor was near the language and motor movement centers in his brain, Richard was kept awake most of the time so we could be sure there was no damage to the nearby healthy tissue,” Dr. Komotar said. “This is an excellent example of the specialized neurosurgeries our team does every day while keeping patients safe during these difficult times.”

“UHealth Neurosurgery is home to luminary brain and spine surgeons,” said Allan D. Levi, M.D., Ph.D., professor and chair of neurosurgery; Robert M. Buck Distinguished Chair in Neurological Surgery; and chief of neurosurgery at Jackson Memorial Hospital. “We are proud that we can provide nationally recognized excellent care with the utmost safety despite the challenges as our country navigates this pandemic.”

Telehealth Visits

After his surgery, Richard Laggan was able to return home the next day on April 17. He will also receive long term follow-up care with a Sylvester neuro-oncology specialist as well as chemotherapy, radiation and possible enrollment in one the of clinical trials offered at Sylvester.



Dr. Komotar in surgery.

Dr. Komotar has continued to monitor Richard's condition through [UHealth Virtual Clinics](#), which is the health system's telehealth platform.

"Even during the COVID-19 crisis, we have been able to provide top-notch medical care to our patients," he said.

Because patient safety remains a top priority, UHealth Neurosurgery is offering telehealth visits, in addition to traditional in-person appointments. Telemedicine allows neurosurgeons to maintain a high level of care for patients and provide them with expert consults in the comfort and safety of their homes.

Reflecting on her husband's treatment and recovery, Beth Laggan said, "Dr. Komotar has a warm bedside manner and really cares about his patients. Whenever I have a question, I email him and get a response right away. It's been a roller coaster for us, but I know my husband is in good hands."

Learn more about UHealth Neurosurgery's [innovative treatments and services](#), and see a [full list](#) of neurosurgeons.