

IMRT Today

When Patsy Huban, 57, was diagnosed with a rare form of throat cancer, her husband immediately began researching her treatment options and discovered IMRT. To get access to this technology, the couple drove 70 miles from their home in Athens, Georgia, to Emory University Hospital in Atlanta every day for 33 days so that Patsy could receive IMRT to destroy her cancer while preserving her hearing, her speech, her teeth, and her salivary function—all of which otherwise would have been at risk.

“My doctor told me that, of all the places to have radiation, mine was the most challenging because of all the delicate tissues nearby,” Huban said. “Luckily, IMRT was available at Emory. I feel very, very lucky,” she said.

Patients around the world are discovering IMRT—on the Web, in news reports, and in materials mailed by hospitals that offer IMRT. In the last year, major news stories about IMRT appeared in national publications like *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, *Business Week*,

Forbes, *Investor’s Business Daily*, and in hundreds of regional papers like the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Miami Herald*, *South China Morning Post* and *Hindustan Times*. IMRT stories also ran on news broadcasts on ABC, NBC, and CBS affiliated television stations in the U.S., and on the BBC in the United Kingdom.

The number of cancer treatment centers offering Varian’s SmartBeam™ IMRT has been more-than-doubling every year. In 1997, there was one SmartBeam IMRT site in the world. By the year 2000, this number had grown to 40. The number jumped to 82 in 2001 and to 188 in 2002. In 2003, the number shot up again, to 472. At this rate, the number of clinics offering IMRT could well rise to 1,000 by the end of 2004.

While IMRT is still primarily used at many clinics for treating cancers of the prostate, head and neck, and breast, doctors have also begun to use

it to treat gynecologic tumors, pancreatic cancer, gastro-intestinal tumors, pediatric cancers, lung cancer, central nervous system and brain tumors, lymphoma, sarcoma, and mesothelioma.

Said Dr. Arno J. Mundt, radiation oncologist at the University of Chicago, who has studied the adoption of IMRT at medical institutions across the country: “The literature has established that IMRT is superior to conventional techniques in many tumor sites, and data is now accumulating to suggest that the benefits of IMRT translate into lower rates of toxicity and, in select sites, improved tumor control.”

The word about IMRT is getting out and cancer patients, like Patsy Huban, are starting to ask their doctors if IMRT is right for them.

David Prislupsky was treated for prostate cancer at the The Dale and Frances Hughes Cancer Center in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. He’d been considering laparoscopic surgery, when he found out about IMRT from

another man in his cancer patient support group.

“He told me all about it and I was interested,” Prislupsky recalled. “He’d downloaded information from the Internet about IMRT at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, and he gave me a copy.” That led him to find an IMRT site in his area.

“Being diagnosed with cancer is not a death sentence,” said Aileen Pruitt, 41, a cancer survivor who was treated for breast cancer at Martin Memorial Hospital in Stuart, Florida. Pruitt opted for a combination of chemotherapy and IMRT. Other than a slight reddening of the skin, there were no side effects from the 33 IMRT treatments she received and the outcome was successful.

“You must check out all your options and go with the ones that make you feel most comfortable — sometimes, it means you have to travel to a treatment center where you can receive state-of-the-art IMRT treatment.” ■



Patsy Huban, a head and neck cancer survivor who was treated with SmartBeam IMRT, enjoys riding horses with her husband on the family’s farm in Athens, Georgia.