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Health Matters: Brachytherapy

Triston Sanders - Medical Anchor

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States. Radiation is just one form of treating this disease and many advancements have been made in the science of using radioactive material to treat cancer.

In this Health Matters we take a look at one of these advanced forms of treatment called brachytherapy.

Brachytherapy is considered an advanced form of cancer treatment even though oncologist Eric Rost says the concept is not new at all.

Eric Rost says, "It actually was the first form of radiation therapy ever used over a hundred years ago. Now a days we use it with a much more refined sense."

This process involves implanting small radioactive pellets, which allows radiation to travel within a few millimeters to kill nearby cancer cells. The latest form also uses catheters to place the pellets and is called high dose brachytherapy.

"We have a computer and a robot and inside the office, without need for hospitalization, we can place the radioactive source into the tumor for a treatment that will last only a few minutes."

The term "brachy" is Greek for short distance, and this type of radiation therapy is localized, precise and high-tech.

"It's a very easy form of radiation for a specified limited use."

It is almost always used in conjunction with other forms of radiation, except with prostate cancer, where it is used alone.

"Prostate cancer is one of those that we do use it alone, in many cases with very good results."

Brachytherapy has proven to be effective in the treatment of many kinds of cancer and patients often suffer fewer side effects then when external radiation or surgery is used.

There are two different kinds of brachytherapy: permanent, when the pellets remain inside of the body, and temporary, when the seeds are inside the body and then removed.

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