

Olympic skating star Scott Hamilton in perfect form



Towering exhibits and impressive treatment systems are generally the star attractions in the exhibitor's hall at the annual meeting of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS). But at the 2005 meeting, held April 16-21 in New Orleans, La., USA, it was a slight figure in Elekta's booth that drew the most attention.

Scott Hamilton, who spoke about his recent Gamma Knife® surgery, is a four-time U.S. National Champion, a four-time World Champion and Olympic Gold Medalist. He received widespread coverage on his battle with testicular cancer in 1997. Following that experience, he gained renown for his inspirational talks on his life and achievements, as well as his humanitarian work with cancer organizations.

Choosing the Best Treatment

In 2004, after several months of fatigue, headaches and vision problems, physicians discovered Olympic skater Scott Hamilton had a craniopharyngioma, a rare, non-cancerous pituitary brain tumor. Hamilton's had both a solid and a cystic component.

With conventional surgery too risky, Hamilton turned to Gamma Knife® surgery, performed at the [Cleveland Clinic Gamma Knife Center](#) by Dr. Gene Barnett and Dr. John Suh on December 13, 2004.

Before the surgery, Hamilton consulted with Dr. Barnett and other Gamma Knife surgery specialists. He considered the risk of an open craniotomy and balanced that with the opinions of those promoting radiosurgery with Leksell Gamma Knife® or conventional fractionated radiation therapy.

'I decided I wanted to take the safest route, that I had too much at stake, especially with a new family,' he says. 'I chose Gamma Knife surgery for the accuracy and efficiency.'

'When I first heard of Leksell Gamma Knife® I thought it was so cool and high tech, but I never thought I would need it,' Hamilton said.

Two post-procedure MRI scans have brought good news. The first, performed in February, showed that the solid component of the tumor had been eradicated by Gamma Knife surgery, although the cyst remained stable in size. A second scan, conducted the week after AANS in April, 2005 showed the tumor had shrunk by more than 10 percent and that the adjacent brain tissue had returned to a more normal appearance.

A remarkable experience

Hamilton spoke twice to AANS attendees about his Gamma Knife surgery experience, offering a patient's viewpoint on the tumor's discovery, the choice of non-invasive surgery and his recovery.

'I wouldn't give the tumor back for anything,' Hamilton says. 'The love and support from my wife and my church family, the realization that I have so much to live for with my son'...It's been a tremendous experience.'

Hamilton's Gamma Knife surgery

For Hamilton, the worst part of the operation actually occurred before the actual treatment. 'I had to have a brain biopsy, which was the scariest part' he said. 'I knew that whatever came after that would be a walk in the park. I remember waking up in the recovery room, seeing it was 10:20 and knowing where I was and who I was. That was the greatest feeling in the world.'



On the day of the surgery, physicians explained to him and his wife Tracie the day's activities, and then attached the frame. After the planning was completed, treatment required 25-30 minutes. Hamilton praises the gentleness of Leksell Gamma Knife treatments. 'I felt fine the next day,' he adds. 'And that night, Tracie and I celebrated with our anniversary dinner.'

'Some people say a glass is half-full or half-empty. I have a glass-and-a-half.'