

ANA/NJ Mini-Conference



Welcome by Dave Belonger, Conference Chairman

More than 90 people, including several from NY, PA and even a group from Washington, DC, attended ANA/NJ's October 25, 2008, Mini-Conference, "Acoustic Neuroma: Treatment Options & Quality of Life," held at the Summit Medical Group's new Berkeley Heights Campus in Berkeley Heights, NJ. The registration and lunch before the conference sessions began was a time for greeting old acquaintances and meeting new friends. For the opening session, three prominent NJ doctors examined the pros and cons of current treatment options for acoustic neuroma. Dr. Robert Jyung (UMDNJ) looked at the three surgical approaches: middle fossa (good hearing preservation rate; disadvantage of limited view of the tumor); retrosigmoid (good hearing preservation rate; cases of CFS leak, post-op headaches); translabyrinthine (early identification of facial nerve; hearing loss unavoidable). Dr. Jyung began his presentation by cautioning that patients should not rush into surgery. It's important first to check on the tumor's growth characteristics; and possibly, if slight hearing loss is the only symptom, the risks involved with any treatment might be avoided temporarily or altogether by "watch-and-wait." The second speaker, Dr. Richard Stabile (Overlook Hospital) looked at the radiosurgery/radiotherapy option, noting first that the basic goal of radiation treatment is to stop tumor growth. The tumor is not removed, but most of the risks associated with surgery may

be avoided. Dr. Stabile called attention to the CyberKnife robotic delivery system available at Overlook, which has the advantage of a more user-friendly soft plastic face mask compared to the Gamma Knife head frame system. Dr. Stabile reviewed the outcomes for 21 AN patients treated by CyberKnife at Overlook. For this data,



L to R: Drs. Richard Stabile, Robert Jyung, and Richard Hodosh

please see the article "CyberKnife at Overlook" in the ANA/NJ Newsletter for Sept. 2008.

Dr. Richard Hodosh (Atlantic Brain and Spine Institute, Summit, NJ) rounded out the session by using examples of cases from his own practice to review the increasingly popular wait-and-watch option. When to wait-and-watch? It was for example a "no brainer" for him (Dr. Hodosh said with a smile) when a 67 year-old man presented with a 6mm acoustic neuroma. But, he was asked, is wait-and-watch a wise choice for younger patients with small tumors and no acute symptoms, with the idea in mind that new and better treatments for AN are just around the corner? This was the interesting question that began the lively and wide-ranging Q&A period with which the session ended.

The next session of the conference introduced Dr. Nancy Cotter, Medical Director of Atlantic Integrative Medicine, whose topic was "Beyond Treatment: The Integrative Approach to Post-op Problems."



Dr. Nancy Cotter

Dr. Cotter is a teacher of acupuncture and long-time student of Chinese herbal medicine. She has studied therapeutic movement techniques such as yoga, Tai Chi and dance therapy, and is a faculty member of the Department of Physical Medicine at UMDNJ. Dr. Cotter emphasized at the outset that integrative medicine does not simply mean using “unusual” methods of healing in place of conventional medicine. Rather, as defined by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, an agency of the National Institutes of Health whose website Dr. Cotter recommended to our attention, integrative medicine combines treatments from conventional medicine with techniques from complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for which there is “some high-quality evidence of safety and effectiveness.” (See www.nccam.nih.gov) Dr. Cotter spoke of mind-body medicine and how conventional medicine has come to recognize the value of techniques to enhance the human mind’s capacity to affect healing. The National Center has stated: “Some techniques that were considered CAM in the past have become mainstays (for example, patient support groups and cognitive-behavioral therapy). Other mind-body techniques are still considered CAM, including meditation, prayer, mental healing, and therapies that use creative outlets such as art, music or dance.” Part of the mission of the National Center (NCCAM) is to help health professionals to understand which CAM therapies have been proven to be safe and

effective. Dr. Cotter was very frank that not all CAM techniques would benefit acoustic neuroma patients. But cases of fatigue, she felt, could surely be helped by acupuncture or perhaps meditation, and balance problems by yoga or Tai Chi. And tinnitus, if new, ought to respond well to acupuncture (at least 3 sessions), preferably accompanied by herbal therapy, while facial paralysis might require as many as 20 acupuncture sessions. With acupuncture, she pointed out, there is a cumulative effect that should not be slighted. Dr. Cotter ended her presentation with a demonstration (by audience choice) of the technique of meditation.

For the remainder of the afternoon the conference program offered the choice of participating in one of two patient-conducted sessions. Kathie Belonger and Suzanne Milani presided over a “Caregivers’ Meeting” where spouses, family members and/or friends of acoustic neuroma patients could compare experiences and express concerns. In addition to Kathie and Suzanne, participants who volunteered beforehand to take part in this open discussion were Bill Bifulco, Jeane Gregg, Dominick Guadiso and Karen Reid.

The second session, presided over by Joe Dombrowski, was a “Patients’ Panel” for discussion of particular post-op problems experienced by acoustic neuroma patients. The panelists were Debbie Hookway (headache), Jane Huck (eye problems), Mike Illuzzi (tinnitus, Neuromonics treatment), Victor Mankoski (hearing loss, BAHA) and Tim Reid (balance problems).

Note: most of the participants named above are listed in the latest Directory of ANA/NJ Members and Friends.



ANA/NJ wishes to extend thanks to the Summit Medical Group for contributing use of its new Berkeley Heights facility for the conference.