

State Health Coordinating Council
Public Hearing Comments
Dr. Tony Asher
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Good morning, my name is Tony Asher, and, as Mr. Mallowney just stated, I am a Charlotte-based neurosurgeon. Thank you for the opportunity to present our petition for a gamma knife in the western portion of North Carolina. Out of respect for your time, I am going to read my remarks today.

My professional qualifications relevant to this presentation are as follows: I am Director and Chief of Clinical Operations, Atrium Health Neuroscience Institute; Neurosurgery Residency Program Director at Carolinas Medical Center; Director of the Adult Brain Tumor Program at Levine Cancer Institute, and I am a Clinical Professor in Neurosurgery at the University of North Carolina and at Vanderbilt University. I've served as President, Congress of Neurological Surgeons, Chairman of the Brain Organ Site Committee of the American College of Surgeons Oncology Group, Director of the American Board of Neurological Surgery, and I am Treasurer elect, of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons.

Radiosurgery also known as SRS (or stereotactic radiosurgery), is high dose, tightly focused radiation therapy, usually delivered in a single session. It is a well characterized, effective and safe treatment for a variety of clinical conditions, particularly cancer. Its use in the brain has increased significantly over time due to a variety of factors including improvements in radiosurgery technologies, an increased incidence of brain cancer, and research, published by our group and others, demonstrating that radiosurgery is superior to traditional therapies such as whole brain radiation in preserving patients' quality of life.

Furthermore, and as Mr. Mallowney has previously mentioned, additional studies have demonstrated that SRS can be used instead of, or in combination with, other treatments including open surgery, to improve patient outcomes for an expanding array of disorders ranging from movement disorders, to benign tumors to vascular malformations in the brain.

There is a significant need for radiosurgical services in our state, a need which is incompletely met by the current number of available, dedicated radiosurgery devices. The Gamma knife, which is a particular method of radiosurgical treatment, has unique advantages over alternative therapies such as linear accelerator based SRS. Those advantages include increased precision, thus safety, improved efficacy, and substantially increased efficiency. North Carolina's per population allocation of gamma knives is among the lowest in the nation, suggesting we could, and likely should, support an additional device. Locally, which is to say in the western part of the state, and more specifically in the Charlotte metropolitan region, we have experienced a population explosion, and an associated increase in the pathologies relevant to gamma knife therapy, particularly brain tumors. Our own cancer program has expanded dramatically over the last several years. In 2018, 18,000 new patients were seen at the Levine Cancer Institute. We have experienced 80% volume growth over the last 5 years. In our region Carolina Neurosurgery and Spine Associates and Southeast Radiation Oncology-among the largest and busiest groups nationally in our respective fields- uniquely collaborate in providing SRS for our patients and cooperatively engage in cutting edge radiosurgery research along with Atrium Health and numerous other clinical experts, including dedicated neuro oncologists. Our current radiosurgery device, a non-dedicated linear accelerator (in other words, it's used for many purposes aside from SRS), has reached its functional limit in terms of the number of patients we can treat on an annual basis. Absent a more efficient and dedicated device, we will be unable to adequately serve

the many patients in our large catchment area who rely on our comprehensive cancer services.

In summary, our state needs an additional gamma knife radiosurgical device to serve the many patients who would benefit from this important technology. Our citizens are specifically lacking adequate access to the accepted gold standard for cranial radiosurgical therapy. Atrium is uniquely positioned to provide gamma knife therapy, due to our large patient volumes, our comprehensive, multi-disciplinary expertise, and our demonstrated, and nationally recognized commitment to advancing the science of radiosurgical care.

We respectfully request your favorable review of our application. Thank you for your attention. I'd be happy to answer any questions.