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Glioblastoma Multiforme Brain Tumors

Glioblastoma multiforme is the highest grade glioma (grade 4) tumor and is the most malignant form of astrocytomas. These tumors originate in the brain.

General symptoms of this type of tumor are the same as for brain tumors. Specific symptoms will depend on the size and location of the glioblastoma multiforme.

Causes and Risk Factors

Although glioblastoma multiforme brain tumors can occur at almost any age, they're most common after 50 years of age.

Diagnosis

A neurologic evaluation should be done if a patient has slowly increasing signs of mental dysfunction, new seizures, persistent headaches or evidence that there is pressure inside the skull, such as vomiting or swelling or protrusion of the blind spot at the back of the eye.

A neurologist (a doctor who has received special additional training in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the brain, spinal cord and nerves) performs a complete examination, which may include a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan, a computed tomography (CT or CAT) scan or a chest X-ray to determine if the tumor has spread from another part of the body. An MRI usually finds low-grade astrocytomas earlier than CT. Cerebral angiography is rarely used to diagnose a brain tumor, but it may be done before surgery.

Depending on the patient's symptoms, specialized tests may be done, including tests of the field of vision, the sharpness of vision and hearing. If the results of other tests are not conclusive, an examination of the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord may be done, although it is usually unnecessary.

Treatments

Treatment of a brain tumor depends on the nature of the tumor, how rapidly it is growing, what symptoms it is causing and where it is located. Radiation therapy is required to treat gliomas. Chemotherapy also benefits some patients with such tumors.

Research is being done on a number of techniques that in the future might help treat gliobastoma multiforme, including:

> Radioactive seed implants
> Stereotactic radiosurgery
> New forms of chemotherapy

Only about one out of every four patients with this type of tumor survives two years. Prospects are better when:

The patient is younger than 45

> All or most of the tumor can be removed
> The tumor turns out to be an anaplastic astrocytoma, which is one stage less severe than gliobastoma multiforme