

# MyHealthy Decisions

CANCER CARE ISSUE 2020



Bassett Healthcare  
Network

## CLINICAL TRIALS

# Improving treatment outcomes

William Mokay, 71, of Delhi, visits his primary care provider every six months for a physical examination, knowing his age and risk for prostate cancer. In February 2019, during a routine blood test that checked for prostate-specific antigens (PSA), the results came back elevated. His practitioner, Sean Secord, RPA-C, acted quickly and referred Mokay to Michael Budin, MD, urologist at Oneonta Specialty Services. Dr. Budin then discovered a lump.

“Sure enough, it turned out to be cancer,” says Mokay. “Dr. Budin laid out my options: surgical removal and radiation.” Mokay was directed to Timothy Korytko, MD, radiation oncologist at Bassett Cancer Institute, who offered him a chance to enter a clinical trial.

## GIVING HIM OPTIONS

“At Bassett Cancer Institute, we participate in many clinical trials because we are always looking at ways to improve care,” Dr. Korytko says. “When patients ask how we know what treatment is the best option for them, we examine different available treatments systematically and scientifically.”



William J. Mokay poses on the golf course with his grandson, William.



## CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS

Learn more about clinical trials at Bassett by visiting [bassett.org/clinical-trials](https://bassett.org/clinical-trials) or calling 877-547-1750.

There were two treatment course possibilities for Mokay. The first was comprised of 26 radiation treatments over five to six weeks; the second offered just five doses of radiation every two to three days. “I was assigned the second treatment option,” Mokay says. “My first radiation session was on April 19, and treatments were finished by the end of the same month.”

“Clinical trials are often viewed as a risky experiment or last-ditch effort for cancer patients who have exhausted other options,” says Dr. Korytko. “But the truth is, they offer innovative treatments for patients at different stages of cancer, are vetted nationally and locally to be safe and ethically sound, and can improve future cancer

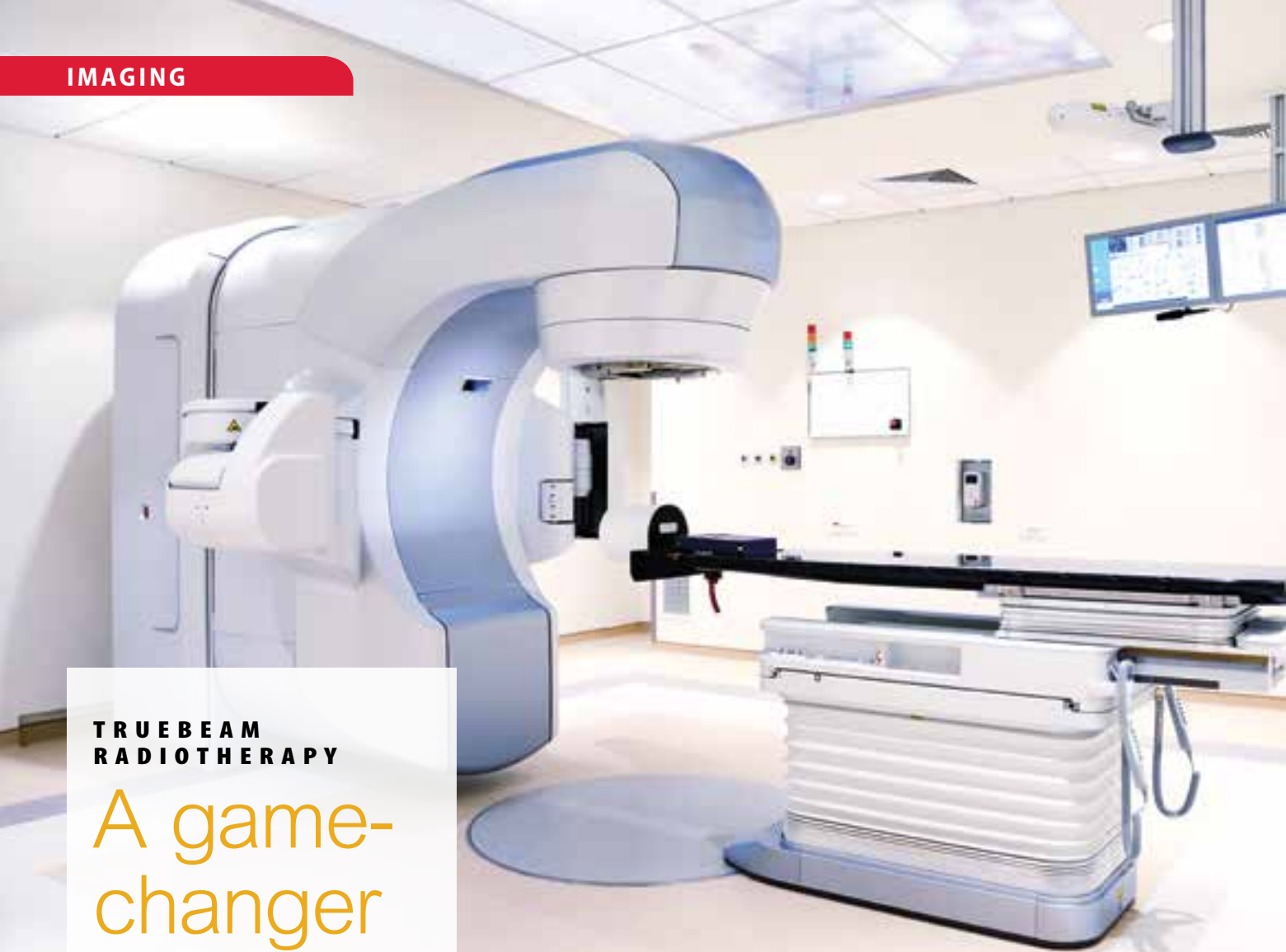
care. Mr. Mokay was presented with two very good treatment options—and there was no placebo or experimental study group.”

## FEELING GOOD

“I didn’t have any side effects from my treatments,” says Mokay. “The cancer responded extremely well and I am in remission today.”

“I encourage my patients to explore clinical trial options whenever they are available,” says Dr. Korytko. “It connects them to the best care and helps future cancer patients.”

“I’m forever grateful to Dr. Korytko and the team at Bassett,” says Mokay. “I am active, playing basketball, golf, and running around with my four grandkids. Life is good.”



**TRUEBEAM  
RADIOTHERAPY**

A game-changer in cancer care



Alfred Tinger, MD

The Bassett Cancer Institute has installed a sophisticated, next-generation radiotherapy system that greatly expands treatment options for cancer patients. The new linear accelerator, known as the TrueBeam, represents

cutting-edge technology that can deliver multiple forms of radiotherapy and treat complex cancers much more quickly.

“Some cancers can be hard to reach and precisely target,” explains Bassett Cancer Institute Chief and Medical Director Alfred Tinger, MD. “The TrueBeam changes that. It is an advanced radiotherapy system with functionality that allows us to treat cancer anywhere in the body as precisely as possible. It offers greater accuracy, speed and comfort for patients. This really is a game-changer in terms of cancer treatment in this region.”


**HOW IT WORKS**

The TrueBeam performs accuracy checks every 10 milliseconds during the course of a treatment, and a patient’s time on the table is reduced by 75 percent. For example, rather than a typical treatment time of 25 minutes for a prostate cancer patient, patients can be done in 5 to 6 minutes, a huge difference for men who are best treated with a full bladder.

“Comfort is so crucial in medical care, especially for our cancer patients,” says Dr. Tinger. “This is an investment in them so they can have a better experience, confidence

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in their treatment and the best opportunity possible for a cure.”

The technology provides image-guided stereotactic radiosurgery and radiotherapy to treat and attack many different types of cancers, such as brain metastases or meningiomas; lung, liver, prostate, and pancreatic cancers; and is also capable of precisely treating breast, esophageal, stomach, gynecological and rectal cancers.

### PATIENT CARE BENEFITS

- ▶ The new linear accelerator rotates around the patient as it delivers a prescribed radiation dose from nearly any angle.
- ▶ Image-guided tumor targeting allows for therapy that is more precise so surrounding healthy tissue is spared.
- ▶ The TrueBeam’s speed and functionality also mean patients are exposed to less radiation.
- ▶ Shorter treatment times improve patient comfort.
- ▶ The advanced motion management feature senses when a patient moves out of range and stops the treatment, enhancing safety.

With the new linear accelerator at Bassett Medical Center in Cooperstown, patients also no longer have to travel long distances to get the advanced cancer care and the technology they need.

“This is a win for us and for our patients,” says Dr. Tinger. “The cancer care team has been at Bassett a long time. They are part of the community, and living here means that we are treating our families, friends and neighbors. We want to provide the best possible care, and this investment gives us a leg up.”

# The right treatment at the right time



Timothy Korytko, MD

Four years ago, during an annual appointment at Sharon Springs Health Center, Doug Plummer’s primary care practitioner,

Stephen Strasser, MD, suggested an endoscopy to explore his complaint about acid reflux.

Plummer, 60, of Sharon Springs, who is active in his community as mayor and owner of the renowned American Hotel, agreed to the follow-up test without much thought. “I appreciated my provider being thorough,” he says. “But I wasn’t too concerned.”

On a total hunch, Dr. Strasser ordered an endoscopy. The results revealed early-stage esophageal cancer. “I wondered how in the world this happened,” says Plummer. “I was a bit overweight and had an elevated blood pressure, but so what?”

**A routine checkup may have saved Doug’s life**

### A SURPRISING DIAGNOSIS

The cancer was in stage two; it was beginning to spread to areas nearby. At Bassett Cancer Institute, Plummer’s newly formed team—Timothy Korytko, MD, radiation oncologist; Eric Bravin, MD, oncologist; and Victoria Stabinski, AGPCNP—recognized

the need for Plummer to undergo an esophagectomy, a specialized surgical procedure where part of the esophagus (the tube that runs between the mouth and stomach) is removed and reconstructed using a portion of the stomach.

The procedure went well, though recovery was difficult. “I lost 65 pounds,” says Plummer. “I looked like a different person.”

### THE CARE HE NEEDED

Plummer is a patient who requires an exceptional bedside manner. “Compassion, to me, is one of the most important parts of a patient’s care journey,” he says. “When I arrived at Bassett, I knew from day one that I was surrounded by amazing people and advanced care.”

Bassett Medical Center offers stereotactic radiation, a non-invasive treatment approach that precisely targets early-stage tumors of the lungs, brain, spine and other parts of the body. The radiation doses—which are much higher than traditional radiation therapy—blast tumors in just a few treatments, with the equivalent of a few weeks’ worth of emissions.

“Mr. Plummer’s treatment regimen included stereotactic radiation,” says Dr. Korytko. “Using a very high dose of radiation, it focuses on just the tumor, and treatment is completed in one to five sessions instead of weeks. It is very focused and safe and avoids exposing surrounding healthy tissues to radiation. In Mr. Plummer’s case, he received three high-dose treatments, did



Pictured: Doug Plummer stands in front of his business, the American Hotel, in Sharon Springs.

very well, and progressed on to obtain his other treatments.”

“I found that treatments were very manageable,” Plummer says.

And following courses of chemotherapy and radiation, there was no evidence of cancer. “I went on with my life, ever thankful,” he says.

### STARTING AGAIN

Then, this past spring, Plummer discovered what appeared to be a basal cell carcinoma on his head. “I have great hair,” he jokes. “I was running my fingers through it one day and thought it must be developing because of my pale skin and years spent in the sun.”

Part of the apparent basal cell was removed for biopsy. To Plummer’s surprise, the results showed not skin cancer, but the same tumor that had been growing in his esophagus.

This time, the COVID-19 pandemic had just begun, and he wondered what treatment would be like in the wake of the crisis. “I arrived back at Bassett, and everyone was calm and professional,” he says. “It was business as usual. I was immediately reassured.”

Plummer reconvened with his care team and began radiation. “We accomplished another program of stereotactic radiation

in just three sessions,” says Dr. Korytko.

Chemotherapy courses followed stereotactic radiation, and Plummer continues to undergo regular infusions. “It sounds crazy, but I look forward to my treatments,” he says. “The people at Bassett Cancer Institute welcome you into their family, and it’s stunning. I can’t imagine taking this journey anywhere else.”



### GET THE CARE YOU NEED

Call **607-547-3336** or **800-BASSETT (227-7388)** to discuss your options. Or visit [bassett.org/radiation](https://bassett.org/radiation) to learn more.



## GET SCREENED TODAY

If it's time for your yearly checkup, call your provider's office today. Or visit [bassett.org/providers](https://www.bassett.org/providers) to find one.

## 'On this journey together'

Renee Butts' care team worked together to find the right treatment for her

When Renee Butts went for a routine Pap test in the summer of 2019, she received alarming news that her screening revealed abnormal cells. A short time later, after a biopsy, the official diagnosis came: she had cervical cancer.

Butts, 39, of Sidney Center, had no symptoms. "I was completely shocked," she says. "I felt perfectly fine—I was working, spending time with my kids and enjoying life."

Gynecological cancers—like cervical cancer—can often be silent. Cervical cancer is notorious for not producing any signs or symptoms until later stages of the disease. That's why routine screenings are so important. "I hadn't gotten a Pap test in some years," recalls Butts. "I'm thankful I got my screening when I did."

### MAKING A PLAN

For the next two months, Butts underwent chemotherapy and radiation treatments. "I was scared at the beginning," she says. "I didn't

think I would be able to work and care for my family."

But when her oncologist, Alfred Tinger, MD, chief of Bassett Cancer Institute, worked with her to create a plan, he reassured Butts that the treatments would be quite manageable and include a component of radiation that she had never heard of—brachytherapy.

During brachytherapy treatments, high-dose radioactive material—usually encased within seeds, capsules or ribbons—is placed directly into the body to internally target areas of tumor growth. Unlike conventional radiation therapy, where a machine projects beams of radiation from outside the body, brachytherapy minimizes the area impacted and delivers exceptionally precise radiation to the cancer.

"Brachytherapy is a very important piece of a patient's treatment regimen for cervical cancer," explains Dr. Tinger. "It produces much better outcomes for early stage cancers. Often,

it is combined with other forms of treatment, including surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. Sometimes it serves as an alternative to other radiation altogether."

In Butts' case, brachytherapy proved effective as a supplement to chemotherapy and traditional radiation treatments. "I had chemo once a week for six weeks, radiation every weekday for six weeks and five treatments of brachytherapy at the conclusion of those cycles," she says. "Brachytherapy treatments lasted less than five minutes."

### PAIN-FREE TREATMENT

Aside from contraction-like pain after her first brachytherapy session, Butts did not experience pain or discomfort during the course of her treatments.

"Brachytherapy can cause fewer side effects than external beam radiation," says Dr. Tinger. "Overall treatment time is also typically shorter."

"I followed my care team's recommendations with nutrition, activity level and rest," Butts says.

"It's more than just advanced treatment options that makes Bassett Cancer Institute special," says Dr. Tinger. "Patients are embraced by a comprehensive team of specialists, including physicians, nurses, a nutritionist, a social worker and more. We're on this journey together."

"I am forever thankful to my care team," says Butts. "I cannot express enough how important it is for people to get screened regularly."

## Get the benefits of MyBassett



With MyBassett Health Connection, you can securely connect with your doctor's office—anytime, anywhere.

Visit [bassett.org/mybassettbenefits](https://bassett.org/mybassettbenefits) to learn more about MyBassett, including how to sign up and download the MyChart app.

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# COVID-19 AND CANCER

## What you should know

There are several things that can put you at high risk for a severe illness with COVID-19. One of them is a history of cancer. If you have cancer now or had it in the past, you may need to take special steps to prevent exposure to the coronavirus.

This is especially true if you're being treated with chemotherapy. That's because chemotherapy can weaken your immune system. And that puts you at higher risk for infection. It also makes an infection more severe.

### HOW TO AVOID INFECTION

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the best way to prevent COVID-19 is to avoid being exposed to the virus by:

- ▶ **Cleaning your hands often.** Use soap and water whenever possible. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds before drying.
- ▶ **Avoiding other people as much as you can.** Choose to stay at home whenever possible. If you must go out, stay at least 6 feet away from others.
- ▶ **Wearing a cloth face mask in public.** Your mask should cover your mouth and nose. This helps protect other people in case you are sick and don't know it yet. Remember that a face mask is not a replacement for social distancing.
- ▶ **Avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth.**
- ▶ **Regularly cleaning and disinfecting high-touch areas in your home.** These include doorknobs, kitchen counters, phones and light switches.
- ▶ **Avoiding being around sick people.**
- ▶ **Asking others in your household to follow these same guidelines.** It's important for them to understand that their actions affect your health and well-being.

Many states have begun lifting stay-at-home protection orders. If yours has, continue acting as though the rules are still in place. Remember: It's important to limit contact with others outside your household to avoid infection.



### OTHER WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Be sure you have a month's worth of the medications you need at home in case you do get sick. This would include any prescription medicines you take, as well as over-the-counter drugs for fever.

If you're scheduled for cancer treatments during this outbreak, talk with your oncologist about

the risks of having or delaying treatment.

And if you have medical appointments scheduled, see if you can visit via TeleMedicine instead of in person. This can help reduce your potential exposure to the virus.



### WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK YOU'RE SICK

If you're being treated for cancer and develop respiratory symptoms and a fever, call your doctor. They will let you know what to do. Be sure to let them know if you're getting chemotherapy.

Some symptoms are severe and could be a medical emergency. Call 911 if you have:

- ▶ Trouble breathing.
- ▶ Persistent pain or pressure in your chest.
- ▶ New confusion.
- ▶ Inability to wake or stay awake.
- ▶ Bluish lips.

If you test positive for the coronavirus, talk with your oncologist about how this might affect any cancer treatment. It's possible your treatment could be delayed until you're well again.

