

# A miracle realized: Taylor's surgery next week

By Amy R. Mack | Daily Herald Staff, Chicago



Laurie Radtke has found her miracle worker. Taylor Radtke, 7, is scheduled for surgery.

Wrapping her arms around neurosurgeon Dr. Robert Spetzler, a relieved Laurie sobbed Thursday when the Phoenix specialist told her, yes, he would try what dozens of other doctors had refused.

"He's like Santa Claus," the Johnsburg mom said moments after leaving the

Barrow Neurological Institute where Taylor will return next Thursday to have the unusual brain tumor - a clivus meningioma - threatening her vision, mobility and life removed.

"It was almost surreal," Laurie said at the joyful news capping her family's desperate search to find a specialist willing to "make Taylor matter." When Chicago-area doctors told the Radtkes nothing could be done, they turned to the media for help. The resulting outpouring of support and offers of help both gave the family comfort and helped lead them to Spetzler.

His okay is what they longed for, but the reality their little girl is about to have brain surgery was hitting hard Thursday.

"I feel elated and like jumping up and down, but the thing is now we're so close to actual surgery and I'm scared to death, to be honest with you," a subdued Laurie said as she and Jeff drove to their temporary home with Taylor and her little brother, Blake, 5. "I'm extremely worried."

Spetzler expressed confidence in being able to help Taylor even as he said it is a difficult surgery on a tumor that's extremely unusual in a child. "It's very unusual to have a meningioma in that location," Spetzler said after meeting with the family where he offered hope for Taylor. "It is a skull-based lesion, but it is an accessible skull-based lesion. Except for the presentation, I think the odds of her doing well are certainly well above 90 percent," the specialist said.

"The goals of any surgery are really, first, to do no harm, and, second, to get rid of the offending problem," Spetzler added. "The first step is to get it out of there. That will determine how well we can get it out and the second is to make sure there are no problems from the surgery. The third is to examine the tissue and pathology and make sure it is what we think it is at this point ... then proceed from that."

The surgeon will use a team approach and has asked another doctor to assist on what he hopes will be an endoscopic approach to the major brain surgery. If they're able, it means they would go into Taylor's brain through her nose - which will have to be broken - instead of having to cut into her skull.



The plan may change because the tumor is already compromising the vital sixth cranial nerve and threatening the carotid artery and pituitary.

Asked why he would agree to such a complicated surgery when other doctors had refused, Spetzler said he felt he could have success for Taylor.

"Patients come here from around the world with complex problems. We really deal with complex neurological cases day in and day out," Spetzler said.

"When you see a lot of complex cases you get a much better feel for these relatively uncommon cases and presentations."

The Radtkes, worn, emotional and very relieved, said they are very grateful. "To give somebody life is ... no one else but God can do that," Laurie said. "For a doctor to be able to do that, that's what he's doing us, giving us a second life with our daughter."

Laurie Radtke gives Dr. Robert Spetzler a hug at the Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix Arizona Thursday.