

## Valley doctor specializes in spine surgery

by Brandy Aguilar, Special Projects

[azfamily.com](http://azfamily.com)

Posted on April 18, 2011 at 12:16 PM

PHOENIX - No one likes getting surgery, but for one Valley girl it wasn't an option. So when it came time to find a doctor, she didn't have to look far. In fact, he's one of a few surgeons in the world doing this procedure.

"I would always have a severe migraine and sometimes it would get so bad that I would get dizzy and I couldn't see," Courtney Rogers said.

Rogers, 16, knew something wasn't right. She had been suffering with migraines for two months.

"Sometimes you brush it off as normal teenage growing up and that's when we decided to go to her doctor," said Courtney's mom Julie.

Julie wanted answers. An MRI of her daughter's neck found a tumor.

"It scared me to death even though they we're benign, still having a tumor near the spine, on the spine it was scary," Rogers said.

The tumor was on the surface of Courtney's spine inside her chest cavity. While benign, if not taken care of, it could lead to issues with breathing and walking.

"Courtney had a very special kind of tumor called ganglioblastoma," Dr. Curtis Dickman said. "It arises from special nerves inside the chest cavity called the sympathetic nerves and it was essentially growing into the nerves, growing around the chest wall."

Dickman is with Barrow Neurological Institute at St Joseph's Hospital. He removed the tumor using a minimally invasive procedure called thoracoscopy.

"We made small incisions in the space between the ribs, two or three small incisions that are half an inch long," Dickman said. "The anesthesiologist puts in a special breathing tube that allows us to selectively breathe for each lung independently."

We're freely able to work inside this open space in the chest cavity doing very complicated surgery, just like we would with open surgery," Dickman said.

This procedure is less painful and gets a patient up on their feet a lot faster. Courtney was out of the hospital in three days.

"I felt good," Rogers said. "It was just trying to move was really hard and I had to use a walker for about a week after the surgery."

Dickman pioneered the use of this procedure for spinal disorders. He's performed more than 800 surgeries and even developed the tools they use in surgery.

"I thought it was really interesting because you don't hear every day that a doctor comes up with this type of procedure," Rogers said.

"It's very gratifying to do a procedure that gets someone out of the hospital faster, help them recover faster, gives them less pain, better cosmetics and a whole new lease on life," Dickman said.