ALASKA WOMAN TREKS TO IOWA WHERE UI NEUROSCIENTISTS REM

'My spring adventure'

Marilyn Barry felt only mild concern when she first heard the ringing in her ears.

When the ringing began sounding like wind chimes, however, she could no longer ignore the symptoms.

"We don't have any wind chimes in our home," Barry says.

The ringing episodes weren't the first signs of trouble. In fact, they underscored a creeping sense that something was not quite right, especially with her sense of balance.

Barry mentioned her hearing and balance problems to her otolaryngologist, Don Endres, MD. Based on the symptoms, Endres ordered a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan and in so doing discovered the root of the problem: Barry had a slow-growing benign tumor called an acoustic neuroma in her right inner ear, near the brain.

Not only was this tumor endangering her hearing and balance, but without treatment it would likely grow to become life-threatening.

While treatment with radiation is an option in some cases, microsurgery remains the treatment of choice for most patients because it is the only proven cure. Unfortunately, surgically removing the tumor requires taking the hearing nerve with it. That meant Barry faced the risk of deafness in her right ear, as well as partial facial paralysis.

It was an especially difficult prospect for Barry. In addition to being academic dean at Alaska Pacific University in Anchorage, she is the organist and music director at her church.

Endres told Barry that of the few centers in the U.S. he would recommend for the surgery, his personal preference was for University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. Having completed his otolaryngology residency there some years before, he was familiar with the nationally ranked department and its high success rates in sparing as much of the patient's hearing as possible.

It didn't take long for Barry to realize that her doctor's recommendation was on the mark. Within an hour of the diagnosis, she received a call from Bruce Gantz, MD, the hospital's head of otolaryngology-head and neck surgery. Gantz, an expert in hearing and balance disorders, explained the procedure and the outcome she could expect based on the high success rates experienced by similar patients treated by the UI Neurosciences team.

Barry had a lot to consider, most of it good. In fact, she invited two of her sisters to join her and her husband for what was becoming a family pilgrimage of sorts.

"It was my spring adventure," Barry says. "My mother was born in Nashua and we have family buried there, yet I had never been. In fact, my great-grandfather helped build the town's famous landmark, the Little Brown Church in the Vale."

The entire experience was

ACOUSTIC NEUROMAS ARE:

- Benign tumors
- Slow growing
- Of unknown cause
- Potentially life-threatening
- Removable by microsurgery

EXPERT NEUROSCIENTISTS

The UI acoustic neuroma team includes:

- Neurologists
- Neurosurgeons
- Otolaryngologists
- Interventional radiologists
- Radiation oncologists
- Neuro-anesthesiologists
- Skilled nurses
- Physical therapists

OVE A LIFE-THREATENING TUMOR FROM HER INNER EAR

everything she hoped for.

The surgery, while complex, went well; Gantz and his otolaryngology colleague, Marlan Hansen, MD, along with other members of the UI care team, saved 70 percent of the hearing in her right ear.

After returning to Alaska, Barry spent one week at home and then gradually returned to her full-time responsibilities with Alaska Pacific University.

"I know everything humanly possible was done to maximize my chance for success and preserve as much hearing as possible," she says. "I'm at peace with it. In fact, I saw the surgery itself as quite an amazing opportunity. Everything was clean, steely, and high-tech. The attention we got from everyone was great."

For more information, patients and families should:

- Call UI Health Access and ask for the Otology/Neurotology Service
- Visit www.uihealthcare.com/otolaryngology.

For consultation or referral, physicians should contact UI Consult.

—Michael Sondergard

BACK HOME IN ALASKA
Marilyn Barry's life has returned to normal after receiving highly specialized surgery to remove an acoustic neuroma.

The UI Neurosciences team for treating patients with small acoustic tumors has one of the nation's highest success rates, with hearing preservation at nearly 80 percent sensitivity.

Patient calls for information/UI Health Access 800-777-8442
Physician calls for consultation and scheduling/UI Consult 800-322-8442