FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

February 24, 2014 — Albuquerque, NM (UNM Cancer Center) — The UNM Cancer Center can now add stereotactic radiosurgery to its growing list of treatment options. This non-invasive outpatient procedure kills tumor cells in the brain in a single treatment. For people with brain tumors or whose cancer has spread to the brain, this treatment option can help to preserve their strength and health.

The procedure uses existing UNM Cancer Center radiation therapy equipment to focus a set of x-ray beams on a single tiny point inside the brain. The x-rays kill the cells at that point. Creating the procedure required a multidisciplinary team that included a neurosurgeon, a radiation oncologist, and a radiation physicist. “The reason stereotactic radio surgery is tricky is because the forgiving aspect of traditional radiation treatment is gone. There is no room for error,” says Thomas Schroeder, MD. Dr. Schroeder is the Medical Director of Radiation Oncology at the UNM Cancer Center and is an Assistant Professor in the Division of Hematology/Oncology in the Department of Internal Medicine at the UNM School of Medicine.

“When we treat someone for breast cancer or lung cancer or a cancer in the abdomen,” he explains, “people are breathing. Their insides move around. We account for this by adding margin to the treatment volume.” Additionally, most radiation treatments are given slowly over weeks. Normal tissues repair damage from the radiation between treatments.

But in stereotactic radiosurgery, there is no room for error because the brain is a very delicate organ and the radiation is given in a single large dose. Physicians painstakingly find the exact location of the tumor. “The tumor could be right next to a very important structure in the brain or next to a very important nerve,” says Dr. Schroeder. “With our process, we can achieve sub-millimeter accuracy. It was a challenge for our physics department to make sure we got everything right.”

Recently, the UNM Cancer Center team successfully treated its first patient using their newly-developed and heavily-tested process. Dr. Schroeder was pleased with the result. “It’s about trying to take care of our patients,” he says. “That’s what we’re here to do.”

**About the UNM Cancer Center**
The UNM Cancer Center is the Official Cancer Center of New Mexico and the only National Cancer
Institute-designated Cancer Center in the state. One of just 68 premier NCI-Designated Cancer Centers nationwide, the UNM Cancer Center is recognized for its scientific excellence, contributions to cancer research, the delivery of high quality, state of the art cancer diagnosis and treatment to all New Mexicans, and its community outreach programs statewide. Annual federal and private funding of over $77 million supports the UNM Cancer Center’s research programs. The UNM Cancer Center treats more than 60 percent of the adults and virtually all of the children in New Mexico affected by cancer, from every county in the state. It is home to New Mexico’s largest team of board-certified oncology physicians and research scientists, representing every cancer specialty and hailing from prestigious institutions such as M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Johns Hopkins University, and the Mayo Clinic. Through its partnership with Memorial Medical Center in Las Cruces, the UNM Cancer Center brings world-class cancer care to the southern part of the state; its collaborative clinical programs in Santa Fe and Farmington serve northern New Mexico and it is developing new collaborative programs in Alamogordo and in Roswell/Carlsbad. The UNM Cancer Center also supports several community outreach programs to make cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment available to every New Mexican. Learn more at www.cancer.unm.edu.

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