Long-term survivorship following stereotactic radiosurgery alone for brain metastases: risk of intracranial failure and implications for surveillance and counselling

Emile Gogineni, John A. Vargo, Scott Glaser, John C. Flickinger, Steven Burton, Johnathan A. Engh, Sushil Beriwal, Annette Quinn, Cihat Ozhasoglu, Dwight Heron

Corresponding author: Emile Gogineni

1. Radiation Oncology, Northwell Health 2. Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, UPMC 3. UPCI, UPMC CancerCenter 4. Neurosurgery, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center 5. Radiation Oncology, University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute 6. Neurosurgery, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Pittsburgh, PA 7. Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, UPMC 8. Radiation Oncology, University of Pittsburgh 9. Medical Physics, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Pittsburgh, PA 10. Radiation Oncology, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

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Abstract

Objectives: Because the vast majority of even the highly-select cohorts of brain metastases patients managed with stereotactic radiosurgery (SRS) alone die within 2 years, there is limited literature on risks of recurrence in these patients beyond 2 years. We hypothesize that, especially for the subset of patients that do not recur in the first 2 years, the risk of subsequent failure beyond 2-years is less than the commonly quoted 50-60% of intracranial failure, wherein less frequent screening may be appropriate. Methods As a part of our prospectively maintained institutional radiosurgery database of 1,122 brain metastases patients treated with SRS from December 2003 – September 2013, we identified 152 patients treated initially with SRS alone (± pre-SRS surgical resection) with at least 2 years of survival and follow-up from SRS. These patients had a sum of 218 brain metastases at the time of presentation and a total of 526 brain metastases treated with SRS over their lifetime. Patients receiving initial or prior whole brain radiotherapy were excluded. Primary study end-points were rates of actuarial intracranial progression beyond 2 years calculated using the Kaplan Meier and Cox regression methods.

Results: The median follow-up from the first course of SRS was 3.5 years [interquartile range (IQR): 2.7-4.8 years]. The median number of metastases treated at first SRS was 1 (IQR: 1-2) to a median dose of 21 Gy in 1 fraction prescribed to the 80% isodose line. Salvage therapy included SRS in 66% (n=87) with a median of 1 (IQR: 0-3) salvage SRS per patient, surgery in 14% (n=18) and whole-brain radiotherapy in 26% (n=34). No salvage was required in 29% (n=38). During the first 2 years, 38% (n=50) of patients (the first 2-yr relapse-free group) had no intracranial relapse while 62% (n=82) had any intracranial relapse. Beyond 2 years, 64% (n=84) had no relapse, while 36% (n=48) had any intracranial relapse. Comparing the first 2-yr relapse-free group to those who relapsed during the first 2 years: the failure rates from 2-4 years post-initial SRS at previously-treated intracranial sites were 8% versus 24% (p=0.02), failure at previously untreated intracranial sites were 17% versus 36% (p=0.03), and any intracranial failures were 25% versus 52% (p=0.01). Total volume of brain metastases treated with SRS over the patients lifetime >5cc was a significant predictor of intracranial failure beyond 2 years, with rates of rate of any intracranial failure between 2-4 years of 51% versus 25% (p<0.01). There were no
significant differences in failure beyond 2-years by GPA, primary site, or tumor volume of first course of SRS. Combining total SRS tumor volume $\geq$5cc and failure prior to 2-years, the 2-4 year risk of any intracranial failure if neither factor was present was 17%, either was 32%, and both was 66% ($p<0.01$). On parsimonious multivariate analysis, failure before 2-years (HR=2.2, 95%CI 1.2-4.3, $p=0.01$) and total SRS tumor volume $\geq$5cc (HR=2.3, 95%CI 1.2-4.3, $p=0.01$) remained significant predictors of intracranial relapse beyond 2-years.

Conclusions: Relapse rates beyond 2 years following SRS alone for brain metastases appear to plateau, especially in patients who do not suffer intracranial relapse within the first 2 years. Only 1/4th of patients who do not suffer relapse within the first 2 years suffer intracranial relapse at 4 years.