



Lou & Jean Malnati Brain Tumor Institute of Robert H. Lurie
Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University

Innovations and Insights 2025 Updates

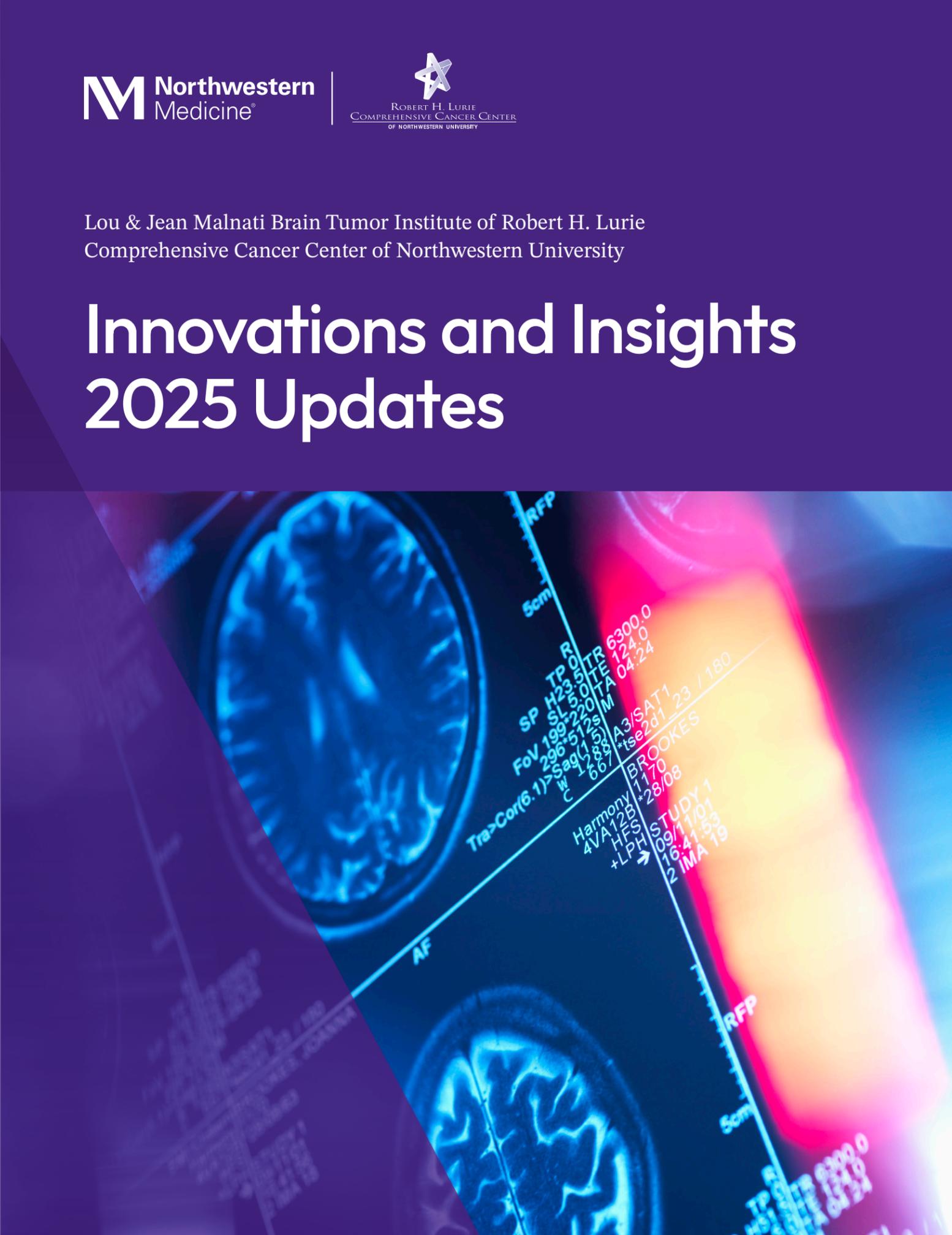


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Year in review

Lou & Jean Malnati Brain Tumor Institute of Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University is pleased to share our clinical, educational and research advancements from the past year, enabled by the gracious generosity of our supporters.

A message from our co-directors

At Malnati Brain Tumor Institute, we're dedicated to delivering the future of brain tumor treatment. Our unwavering commitment to improving patient outcomes drives us to provide the highest level of care for those whose lives are affected by these devastating conditions.

As one of the world's leading brain tumor centers, we're constantly working to develop and deliver the most advanced treatment options to patients across the Chicago area and globe. Our teams work tirelessly to translate scientific breakthroughs into real-world solutions. We collaborate with leading experts, invest in clinical trials and support leading-edge research to push the boundaries of what's possible.

A cornerstone of our approach is our focus on education and research. Together, research and education create a powerful synergy that enhances our capacity to provide exceptional care while training the next generation. We deploy this multi-layered approach to move the needle on our ultimate goal: eradicating brain and spine tumors.

This report highlights key advances of Malnati Brain Tumor Institute from the past year, all of which have been enabled by our incredible community of supporters.

James P. Chandler, MD
Surgical Director
Malnati Brain Tumor Institute

Amy Heimberger, MD, PhD
Research Director
Malnati Brain Tumor Institute

Roger Stupp, MD
Medical Director
Malnati Brain Tumor Institute



Roger Stupp, MD, James P. Chandler, MD, and Amy Heimberger, MD, PhD



Research updates



Through groundbreaking research, our clinician-scientists drive brain tumor care forward, so we can offer the medicine of tomorrow for today's patients.

Clinical trials

Clinical trials offer access to innovative and breakthrough treatment options—like immunotherapy and precision medicine—that are not yet widely available. Critically, clinical trials advance scientific knowledge while developing treatments that may benefit future patients. They are vital for people with brain tumors, especially tumors that resist standard therapies.

As part of the National Cancer Institute-designated Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center, Malnati Brain Tumor Institute stands apart from other institutions for our robust clinical trial portfolio, which spans a growing number of tumor types and is the largest in the Midwest. Our collaboration with departments across Northwestern Medicine, combined with our expanding portfolio of clinical trials, enable us to keep pushing the boundaries of brain tumor care while ensuring patients receive the best care possible.

Study establishes cell death as a driving force in glioblastoma

The process of tumor cell death has been shown to foster brain invasion and suppress the immune system, according to a Northwestern Medicine-led study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

While the relationship between glioblastoma and cell death (necrosis) has been established for over a century, it was unclear if it contributed to cancer growth or was just a byproduct of the disease, says Daniel J. Brat, MD, PhD, chair and the Magerstadt Professor of Pathology, who was senior author of the study.

Using a model approach in mice, this research suggests that necrosis actively contributes to the tumor's growth, Dr. Brat says. The model will help scientists around the world study glioblastoma, and Dr. Brat's lab will use it to uncover new insights about how the cancer progresses.

"I intend to use this model to more extensively study the mechanism over the coming years," adds Dr. Brat. "There is stem cell enrichment, new blood vessel formation and a complete change in the immune landscape following the development of necrosis. All of these components will now be studied with this model."

The Dmello Laboratory launches

Please join us in welcoming Crismita Dmello, PhD, to Malnati Brain Tumor Institute. Dr. Dmello's lab launched on June 1, 2025, marking a significant expansion in our research capabilities.

Dr. Dmello's research focuses on identifying and targeting genetic determinants of immune response in brain cancers. Specifically, her goal is to better understand how tumors evade being detected and eliminated by the immune system. The Dmello Lab will work to develop targeted therapies that can re-engage the immune system, ultimately improving outcomes for patients suffering from aggressive brain tumors, such as glioblastoma.

"Combining passion and purpose is essential to creating better treatment options for brain tumor patients," Dr. Dmello says. By adding another talented scientist, we aim to advance brain tumor care and drive our field forward.



Crismita Dmello, PhD, pipetting with her lab team.



Training the next generation

As part of an academic health system, education is a cornerstone of what we do. It enables us to share expertise, increase access to specialized care and shape our field.

Research shapes medical student's invention and career path

Khizar Nandoliya, a third-year medical student at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, is making strides in innovative research aimed at improving outcomes for patients with aggressive meningiomas.

He is working to develop a novel implant that delivers localized chemotherapy to target microscopic cells left over after a surgery to prevent tumors from recurring. The project was born out of interdisciplinary collaboration between our world-class neurosurgeons, neuropathologists and engineers.

Khizar credits mentorship as a key factor in his academic journey, particularly the guidance of Neurosurgeon and Meningioma Program Director at Malnati Brain Tumor Institute Stephen T. Magill, MD, PhD, whose support and insights have significantly shaped his path. Reflecting on his experiences, Khizar emphasizes the importance of balancing clinical training with research.

“Doing this research has really helped me think about what I want to do for the rest of my career,” Khizar said. “Neurosurgery patients are often very sick, and neurological diseases can have a uniquely detrimental impact on quality of life and patient identity. Working on these clinical projects has shown me the vast opportunities to push the field forward and helped me define the work I want to do as a physician.”



Khizar Nandoliya, left, with Stephen Magill, MD, PhD, right.

Daniel Oyon, MD, chosen as first CAST skull base fellow

Daniel Oyon, MD, a recent Northwestern University Neurosurgery Resident graduate, was appointed as this year's inaugural CAST-approved skull base fellow and will receive further intensive and specialized training in skull base neurosurgery. This program marks a significant milestone in our dedication to training the next generation of leading physicians. Skull base conditions require dedicated and focused surgical training to address the complex needs of these patients and to achieve superior outcomes. This training opportunity will help to ensure more physicians are available with the appropriate expertise to address these challenging cases under the guidance of James P. Chandler, MD, surgical director of Malnati Brain Tumor Institute.



Daniel Oyon, MD

“

I am extremely proud to have been selected as the first CAST skull base fellow at Northwestern, and I am confident that the additional year of training will be well worth it. One month into my fellowship, I have completed numerous cases of the highest complexity with more autonomy than I've ever enjoyed, and I have seen my surgical skills flourish at a rapid pace. With 11 more months to go, I can only imagine how much more confident I will feel at the time of graduation.”

Daniel Oyon, MD
CAST skull base fellow



Expanding care

Our goal is to provide world-class care, no matter where a patient lives or how rare their condition is. Expanding our team enables us to better serve patients and their loved ones—whether they are from the Chicago area or from around the world.

Anas Alshawa, MD, joins brain cancer team

We're proud to announce that Anas Alshawa, MD, has joined Malnati Brain Tumor Institute, enabling us to expand world-class brain tumor care to the south suburbs of Chicago at Northwestern Medicine Orland Park and Northwestern Medicine Palos Hospital. His expertise will bring convenient, high-quality care to more patients.

Dr. Alshawa recently completed his fellowship training in neuro-oncology at McGaw Medical Center of Northwestern University and Northwestern Memorial Hospital, gaining invaluable expertise from international leaders in neuro-oncology, including Roger Stupp, MD.



Anas Alshawa, MD

Launching our paraneoplastic clinic

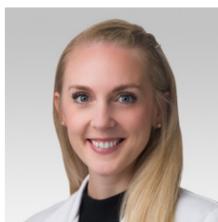
Paraneoplastic neurological syndromes are rare, immune-mediated neurological diseases that develop because of an underlying malignancy. The number of people with paraneoplastic syndromes has nearly doubled in the past 20 years due to the increasing use of novel care immunotherapies, disease recognition, an aging population and rising cancer rates.

To address this growing need, we launched the Northwestern Medicine Paraneoplastic Clinic in downtown Chicago. The clinic is led by a highly skilled team of experts, including Shailee Samir Shah, MD, Ditte Primdahl, MD, and Karan S. Dixit, MD.

The clinic aims to identify these syndromes early to facilitate a timely diagnosis and management, improve patient outcomes, and help patients enjoy a better quality of life. It marks another step toward our mission to deliver leading-edge care for rare and poorly understood conditions. Our clinic is the first in the Midwest offering paraneoplastic expertise to patients.



Shailee Shah, MD



Ditte Primdahl, MD



Karan Dixit, MD



Events

Our events help us support, educate and treat countless patients and their loved ones so we can continue to be a leading destination for brain tumor care.

James P. Chandler, MD, and Jean Miller-Malnati at Minds Matter.

Minds Matter

More than 380 philanthropists, physicians and patients attended the 17th Annual Minds Matter benefit on May 9, 2025.

The event featured a dinner, auction and paddle raise, as well as remarks from institute co-directors James P. Chandler, MD, Roger Stupp, MD, and Amy Heimberger, MD, PhD.

Minds Matter raised **more than \$800,000** to support brain tumor research and patient care at Malnati Brain Tumor Institute.

This year, we established the Transformational Impact Award to honor individuals who have profoundly impacted scientific progress and patient care. Dr. Chandler presented the inaugural award to Jean Malnati-Miller, who has been a staunch advocate for cancer research and care since her husband, Lou Malnati, was treated for melanoma at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in the 1970s.

In 2017, Lou Malnati Cancer Research Foundation made a transformational gift to help advance education, research and patient care at Malnati Brain Tumor Institute. The foundation has been instrumental in funding cancer research, raising more than \$4 million to benefit organizations including Malnati Brain Tumor Institute.

Save the date for next year's Minds Matter event on May 1, 2026, at the Four Seasons Hotel Chicago where we will honor Robin Loewenberg Tebbe for her dedication to supporting the brain tumor community.



Scan the QR code to reserve your ticket now.

Summer Rooftop Celebration

The Malnati Brain Tumor Institute Summer Rooftop Celebration, hosted by Joe Stefani and Josh VanSwol on behalf of Desert Cactus, was held on September 18, 2025, at Gibsons Italia. This annual event benefits our Patient and Family Assistance Fund, which aims to ease the financial burden of cancer treatment and provide support services so patients can focus on healing and quality time with their loved ones. This year we are pleased to announce we raised \$51,850.

This year, Ryan and Susan Fitzgerald joined the celebration to share how the fund affected their care journey for the better after Ryan was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Support of our Patient and Family Assistance Fund directly impacts countless patients, their caregivers and loved ones.



Summer Rooftop Celebration presenting sponsors Josh VanSwol, left, and Joe Stefani, right.

Save the date for our next Summer Rooftop Celebration on September 10, 2026, at Gibsons Italia.

Education event for patients with acoustic neuromas

On September 20, 2025, Malnati Brain Tumor Institute hosted the Acoustic Neuroma Association (ANA) patient education event. Acoustic neuromas are noncancerous tumors that can affect hearing and balance because they develop along the nerve that goes from the inner ear to the brain.

At this event, leading experts gathered to share insights on topics such as treatment planning and symptom management with over 100 patients, caregivers and advocates. Malnati Brain Tumor Institute provides advanced care for more people with acoustic neuromas than any other center in Chicago. We're proud to care for more people with acoustic neuromas than any other center in Chicago.

Lou Malnati's Cancer Research Foundation Benefit

This year, the Lou Malnati Cancer Research Foundation held its 53rd annual Cancer Research Benefit on September 27 at The Matrix Club in Naperville. The event raised over \$465,000 to support Malnati Brain Tumor Institute, Gilda's Club of Chicago and Pickles Group.

To date, the Lou Malnati Cancer Research Foundation has raised more than \$4 million to benefit organizations dedicated to finding a cure for cancer, including Malnati Brain Tumor Institute.

“Malnati Brain Tumor Institute is at the forefront of pioneering research that saves and changes lives. As a neurosurgeon at Malnati Brain Tumor Institute for 30 years, I've seen firsthand how these advances, fueled by the Malnati family, and their charity, have impacted patients and their loved ones. Every step forward brings us closer to breakthroughs—treatments that are less invasive, outcomes that are better, and ultimately, cures that once felt out of reach.

Progress isn't inevitable, rather, it is powered by people who believe in what's possible. Your support isn't just appreciated, it's essential. Without it, these advancements simply don't happen. With it, we can push the boundaries of what's treatable, what's survivable, and what's next on the horizon. We're entering a critical moment, and your partnership can make the difference. Every donation fuels progress. Together, we are not just supporting research, we are accelerating hope to those who need it most.”

James P. Chandler, MD
Surgical Director, Malnati Brain Tumor Institute



Interested in more than an annual update? Sign up for our newsletter to get weekly updates on research breakthroughs, patient stories, community events and more.

Leading the way

Lurie Cancer Center's Malnati Brain Tumor Institute brings together world-class scientific and clinical expertise to develop and deliver innovative treatments for brain and spine tumors. Driven by a dedication to advancing the future of cancer care and a commitment to improving patient outcomes, our patients have access to the latest technologies and cutting-edge therapies through numerous clinical trials.

Researchers, physicians and nurses collaborate closely toward the shared goal of prolonging survival, enhancing quality of life, and ultimately curing cancers of the brain and spine. We are committed to providing compassionate care while delivering the most advanced, effective treatments to our patients.



With thanks,

Leonidas Platanius, MD, PhD
Director, Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of
Northwestern University