



ONLY HERE: NEW TREATMENT TO ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR PANCREATIC CANCER PATIENTS

The “Only Here” series spotlights specialized care uniquely offered by UMass Memorial Health to patients here in Central Massachusetts and beyond. See how we’re equipped to meet our community’s distinct needs.



Pancreatic cancer has the highest rate of mortality of all major cancers, with a five-year survival rate of about 13%. Patients often receive a diagnosis when the disease has already progressed, leaving them with limited treatment options. UMass Memorial Health is the only center in New England offering a pioneering technique that provides these patients with a most precious gift — time. Endoscopic ultrasound-guided radiofrequency ablation (known as EUS-RFA) can enhance both the quality of life and lifespan for patients living with inoperable pancreatic cancer.

NEW OPTION, NEW HOPE

Surgery is the only way to fully cure pancreatic cancer, but fewer than 20% of patients are eligible due to the cancer’s spread by the time of detection. Many patients traditionally receive a form of radiation that beams directly onto the tumor through the skin, attempting to shrink the cancer.



Recently Neil Marya, MD, Co-Director of the Digital Program at the Medical Center, met a colleague at an international conference piloting EUS-RFA and became passionate about bringing this technique to cancer patients in our region. Endoscopic ultrasound is often used as a diagnostic tool for pancreatic cancer, but radiofrequency ablation takes it a step further. EUS-RFA uses a needle connected to a generator that creates radio frequencies, increasing the temperature of the needle and allowing it to burn away cancerous tissue without damaging the healthy tissue nearby.

“Data from the University of Texas shows that patients who receive this therapy are living longer,” said Dr. Marya. “On average, those with inoperable pancreas cancer live only 10 months, but those who receive EUS-RFA are living out to two years. Some patients, even with metastatic [cancer that has spread] disease, who normally

would live about five months, are extending their lives by several years.”

A TEAM EFFORT THAT MOVED QUICKLY

Dr. Marya recalled sharing the concept of EUS radio frequency ablation with colleagues at UMass Memorial Health and witnessing the team spring into action.

“Many of us have deep roots here and have worked together for years. This was a collaborative effort with everyone highly committed to developing a protocol and introducing this treatment for our pancreas cancer patients,” he said.

As a result, in September 2025, just two months after he first shared the idea with colleagues from a variety of specialty areas, UMass Memorial Health began enrolling patients for treatment.

While the quest to find more effective treatments for pancreatic cancer continues, EUS radio frequency ablation gives hope to patients and families facing the challenges of a difficult diagnosis.

“We’re the only hospital in New England offering this kind of minimally invasive, well-tolerated and potentially very promising technology that can alter people’s lives,” said Dr. Marya.

