

HEALTH

Woman's trek raising funds for brain-tumor research

52-year-old cancer survivor is walking to Boston from Long Island, educating people along the way

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What would possess a 52-year-old woman to walk from Long Island to Boston?

For Heidi Gottlieb, treading 10 miles a day for a month is part of a mission.

Speaking on her cell phone from Hope Street in Providence Monday, as she headed toward Pawtucket on her way to Massachusetts General Hospital, she said, "What I'm hoping to accomplish is to spread the word about the need for more research and funding for brain tumors, not just cancerous, but noncancerous."

Gottlieb, owner of a television production company and survivor of a brain tumor, left her home in Port Washington, N.Y., on Oct 1. She is raising money for her nonprofit organization, Brain Matters (www.brain-matters.org), and is also seeking to educate people along the way.

Her trip through Rhode Island included a stop at Brown University's Alpert Medical School, where she met with students and faculty to tell her story: a brain tumor diagnosed as benign in 1990 and treated with radiation, only to grow slowly over the years and be recognized as cancer in 2007, and then treated with proton radiation therapy at Mass. General in 2008. The tumor hasn't grown since.

Gottlieb said she discussed the proton-radiation therapy, but focused mostly on her experiences as patient.

"I've met some extremely fantastic doctors," she said. "I've also had some not-so-good experiences with doctors." For example, over 17 years ago her original neurologist failed to notice that her tumor was growing despite annual MRIs.

Asked how she was feeling, Gottlieb said, "I'm tired now. I feel energized by all the people I've met along the way, and still hope to meet. Physically, I'm pretty tired."

By Monday she had covered a little over 200 miles, taking a day off from walking every third or fourth day.

On her final day next Tuesday, Gottlieb plans to walk the Esplanade along the Charles River. It's a walk she used to take while being treated at Mass. General. "It means something to me symbolically," she said.

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