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Donna Ashlock Long sits with her grandchild recently. The Beaver, Okla., resident was recently diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor and has been given anywhere from six months to a year to live, leaving family members hoping to spend more time with her. Courtesy photos

By ROBERT PIERCE

• Leader & Times

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve, and children all over the world will be looking forward to getting presents from Santa Claus.

Some children, as well as adults, in a Beaver, Okla., family would simply like one gift this holiday season – for their loved one to be back to full health.

A visit to the hospital in Garden City in early December revealed that Donna Ashlock Long had a malignant brain tumor, and the family later got a confirmation from a second opinion at Enid, Okla.'s, Bass Baptist Hospital.

Long's husband, Bobby Long, said Donna, at this point, is feeling very weak and unable to get around.

"She's weak on her right side," Bobby said. "She had brain surgery to remove part of her tumor. They removed half of it, and they put chemo wafers on top of it to try to help."

The Long family went to visit a doctor in Enid on Friday, and Bobby said after talking to radiologist, radiation will likely begin this week.

He added the family, for now, will stay at Bass Baptist.

"Everything's right there," he said. "We don't have to leave."

While the family is likely doing a lot of praying, Bobby said other priorities have taken center stage at the moment.



“Just trying to get everything figured out, get all her bills and order, try to figure out what bills we have and just try to get stuff ready,” he said. “She won’t be able to handle her own affairs. We can. We’re just trying to make her as comfortable and happy as possible.”

The family found out about Donna’s tumor first on Dec. 4, with the confirmation coming on Dec. 18, and Bobby said as soon as they heard the news, everyone was naturally devastated.

“We just try to find strength in each other,” he said. “It just put us to our knees.”

Bobby said Donna will have to have at least three weeks of radiation, followed by a year of chemo tablets, which she will take once a week in an attempt to stop the tumor or at least slow its growth.

Unlike benign brain tumors, malignant brain tumors are cancers that originate in the brain, typically grow faster and aggressively invade surrounding tissue.

Although brain cancer rarely spreads to other organs, it will spread to other parts of the brain and central nervous system.

Brain tumors have many symptoms, and along with weakness, one Donna suffers from with hers is short-term memory loss.

“She can’t remember a lot, and she can’t get around on her own,” Bobby said. “She has to have someone to help her all the time. She can’t even go to the bathroom on her own. It’s totally disabled her.”

Bobby added doctors have given Donna anywhere from six months to a year to live.

“Being Stage IV like it is, it’s very aggressive,” he said. “There’s a slim chance that the radiation will take it, and that’s what we’re hoping for.”

Bobby was recently laid off from his job, and the family is now looking for help with medical expenses.

“I got laid off my job today because I’ve been off with her,” he said. “We just need help with the medical expenses and the drive back and forth to Enid for her treatment.”

Contributions can be made to help with the medical expenses at the Bank of Beaver City branches in Beaver, Turpin, Okla., and Liberal under the Donna Ashlock Long Fund.

Donna, now 56, has lived in Beaver most her life, and Bobby said priorities have changed quite a bit since the diagnosis.

“We just try to keep her bills caught up and make sure we got the money to take her where she needs to go,” he said. “Our world’s been turned upside down. The stress level in our family is way over the top.”

The Longs’ daughter, Amy Poole, said this is not the way the family wanted to spend Christmas, and she said Donna’s health is not the only one in the family to go south during the calendar’s last month.

Bobby himself suffered a heart attack in December 2012, and Amy’s granddad died from a blood clot in December 2008. In addition to the tumor, Donna was also recently diagnosed with an aneurysm, and her kidneys have gone from 18 percent functioning capacity to 10 percent. With that news, Donna was then transferred to St. Mary’s Regional Medical Center in Enid.

The family also suffered another December death in 2012, with the passing of Amy's uncle, leaving her calling the month "not a holiday we like to celebrate."

"December is just miserable," she said. "It is a very unlucky month for our family."

Amy said the family has known Donna's possible outcome since she was admitted to the hospital, and she said the best thing that can be wished for is "more time with Mom."

"Our hope is to have her longer than a year," Amy said.

The daughter said she is not a particularly religious person, but she found herself praying that "some miracle will heal my mom."

"We're prepared for the worst, but we're hoping for the best," she said.

Amy said in the meantime, the family has been trying to keep Donna positive, and according to Amy, her mother has kept an optimistic mind through it all.

"She said she's gonna beat it, and she wants to be there for her kids and grandkids," Amy said.

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