

# Inside The Mind Of A Brain Cancer Neurosurgeon

# Forbes



OurBrainBankBrand Contributor

Forbes EQ **BRANDVOICE**

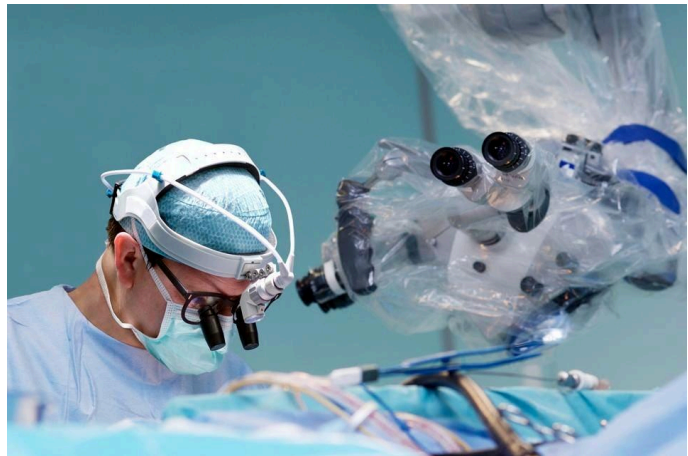
May 31, 2024

*By Tess Pilkington*

During a recent operation on a patient's brain, neurosurgeon [Dr. Daniel Orringer](#) noticed something peculiar: he could almost feel the patient's positivity emanating from them.

Typically, we perceive the person and the brain as a unified, self-regulating agent of the human experience. But treating the brain for illness can forge a divide between the two – a divide-and-conquer strategy, if you will.

Exploring the infinite complexities of the brain is part and parcel of Dr. Orringer's daily professional life. Having lost his mother to cancer when he was young, he has dedicated his career to advancing the safety and efficacy of brain tumor surgery. The benchmark of his success has been the development of a novel laser-based technique – [stimulated Raman histology](#) – to detect tumors that previously were not visible.



**The driving force behind his work is the awareness that the brain in his hands is not just an organ, but a person's mind.**

Some of the brains belong to individuals who have directly impacted his own life, like a software developer who made an important contribution to the smartphone he carries.

This human connection is central to Dr. Orringer's approach to neurosurgery. He believes in involving patients in discussions about their care, encouraging them to see themselves as active participants.

I spoke with Dr. Orringer not only because of his important contributions to the field of neurology, but also because he cared for a brain I know all too well: my mom's.

My mom - Jessica Morris - visited Dr. Orringer to treat her glioblastoma (GBM), the most aggressive form of brain cancer. GBM is rare, with about 13,000 diagnoses in the US annually, and it is devastating. Fewer than 5% of patients survive beyond five years, with a median life expectancy of just 15 months.

Despite these grim statistics, Dr. Orringer remains committed to exploring every possible option for his patients. "We help patients navigate the abyss by taking it one step at a time."

This philosophy extends beyond treatment; he views his patients as vital contributors to advancing the standard of care. For one, all of his GBM patients are enrolled in research studies. He values their participation as integral to pushing the field forward. While his patients are understandably focused on their daily care, he admits, "I'm not sure they fully realize just how significant an impact they are making."

Brain surgery can be a defining moment in the course of a brain disease, greatly influencing outcomes. Dr. Orringer handles this immense responsibility by maintaining open lines of communication with his patients and their families. Understanding their preferences, comforts, and fears builds a foundation of trust and contains the uncertainty, disease's accomplice.

And he's not shy to extend this communication to any patients reading this. "Surgical quality varies depending on provider volume and hospital resources," he notes. "Safety is significantly better at centers where procedures are performed frequently. Patients should seek care from high-volume providers when possible."

**For Dr. Orringer, success is measured by hearing that his patients can return to near-normal function after surgery, even if just for a while.**

These moments allow them to reach milestones they might otherwise miss and experience more of the life waiting for them outside of the hospital. This was clear in how he cared for my mom: he treated her brain and mind as one, making sure she felt valued, cared for, and involved in the guarding of her own life.

Meeting with him today, before I could get a word in edgewise, he had already asked me, the daughter of one of the thousands of patients he's treated over the years, three questions about myself.

---

*Tess Pilkington is on the Board of OurBrainBank, an international nonprofit with active branches in the US and UK founded by her mother, Jessica Morris. Jessica lived for five years with GBM, until June 2021. OBB is dedicated to turning GBM from terminal to treatable, powered by patients.*

To find out more about OurBrainBank, or to support OBB's work, visit its [website](#). Follow OBB on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).



#### OurBrainBank

OurBrainBank is an innovative, patient-led movement designed to move glioblastoma from terminal to treatable, powered by patients. It's the first non-profit created by, with, and for people living with glioblastoma, an aggressive and rare brain cancer. Founder Jessica Morris (1963-2021) survived for five years after her diagnosis. The five-year survival rate is 5%. We believe in patient power and the importance of donating data to medical research. Patient-driven data is the new currency in medical research. OurBrainBank is a registered nonprofit 501(c)3 based in the US and registered charity in the UK.