If you think it's just a cyst you could be DEAD wrong!

BEFORE AFTER

What is Merkel Cell Carcinoma (MCC)?
MCC, also referred to as neuroendrocrine carcinoma, arises from uncontrolled growth of Merkel cells in the skin. It is a highly aggressive form of skin cancer with an incidence of about 1500 US cases per year, and this number is increasing. MCC will prove fatal in roughly 1/3 of patients. It typically occurs on sun-exposed skin such as the head/neck and arms, but it can occur anywhere on the body, including sun-protected areas.

What does MCC look like?
MCC usually appears as a firm, painless, shiny lump on or under the skin. The lump may be red, pink, or blue in color and vary in size from less than a quarter of an inch to more than two inches. MCC is often misdiagnosed as a benign cyst.

Who gets MCC?
Individuals over the age of 65 are far more likely to develop MCC. Fair skin and a history of extensive sun exposure also increase the chances. MCC is associated with weakened immune function, such as in patients with HIV or organ transplants. However, most people who get MCC are not immune suppressed.

What makes MCC so deadly?
MCC is different from other skin cancers in that it grows rapidly over a few weeks or months. It often spreads to regional lymph nodes and to the liver, bone, lungs, and brain. The best treatment for MCC is still controversial and often involves a combination of radiation, surgery, and in advanced disease, chemotherapy. Overall 5-year survival for patients diagnosed with MCC is 64 percent, but half of patients with advanced MCC will live only 9 months. The disease recurs in about 50 percent of patients.

Where can I learn more?
www.cancer.gov
www.merkelcell.org
http://groups.google.com/group/merkelcell

Thanks to the American Cancer Society for a grant to the University of Washington that is funding research aimed at developing improved treatment for MCC and to the Jerry Wachter MCC fund at the American Cancer Society to educate physicians so they can catch the disease early enough to cure patients.