



“Am I Going to Die?”

Illyria’s patient story began with a strange warning sign - she stopped growing. Up until that point, the twelve-year-old had always been one of the tallest kids in her class, but her friends had overtaken her in height dramatically by 2015.

“We thought it was unusual, so we visited our pediatrician,” recalls Illyria’s mother, Julie. “He referred us to McMaster Children’s Hospital, where testing revealed that a deficiency of growth hormone was stunting her growth.”

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(Continued from page 1) Investigation of Illyria’s hormone deficiency in 2016 included an MRI scan of her brain, leading to the discovery of a brain tumour.

“Telling her about the tumour was really tough,” says Julie. “Her first question was, ‘Am I going to die?’ I was confident that the team at McMaster Children’s Hospital would do everything possible to help her, but it was a terrifying situation.”

A brain biopsy revealed that the tumour was cancerous. Surgery was not a viable option, so she underwent four rounds of intensive chemotherapy. “Although Illyria lost her hair and became very frail, she kept a positive outlook on life and was determined to beat cancer.”

Illyria also received blood transfusions at McMaster Children’s Hospital and 20 rounds of radiation at Juravinski Hospital and Cancer Centre. “After nine months of treatment, Illyria’s cancer was in remission,” says Julie. “She was so happy when she could return to school and spend time with her friends again.”

Although Illyria’s treatment is over, she visits McMaster Children’s Hospital several times a year for testing and ongoing growth-hormone treatment to support her physical development. Illyria also receives care for additional medical conditions, including a life-threatening form of adrenal insufficiency and a rare form of diabetes.

“The care we receive at Hamilton Health Sciences is outstanding,” says Julie. “We will always be grateful for the expertise and kindness that helped our daughter beat brain cancer.”



To watch a video about Illyria’s story or to make a donation, visit hamiltonhealth.ca/illyria



Perseverance of a Champion

Natalie Hammond is a Champion. The 16-year-old from Burford recently travelled to Orlando representing McMaster Children’s Hospital Foundation at Children’s Hospitals Week. This celebration highlighted the importance of donor support to enabling the specialized care of pediatric patients.

Natalie’s medical journey began when she started to feel extreme pain throughout her body during a dance class. An MRI at the hospital in Woodstock revealed that the pain was caused by tumours growing in her spinal column.

“I underwent an eight-hour surgery at McMaster Children’s Hospital to remove the tumours,” says Natalie.

Although Natalie still experiences some pain, her condition is improving. “I’m forever grateful for all that they’ve done for me at McMaster Children’s Hospital,” she says.

Children’s Hospitals Week Canada was made possible by the generosity of Presenting Sponsor Walmart, Official Airline Sponsor Air Canada Foundation and Official Sponsor The Brick. As a Champion, Natalie is proud to be a patient ambassador who represents the world-class health care services available at McMaster Children’s Hospital.



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A Q&A with a Pediatric Chemotherapy Nurse

Have you ever wondered what it is like to be a chemotherapy nurse? Meet Registered Nurse Michelle Dawson, who has worked as a pediatric chemotherapy nurse at McMaster Children's Hospital for 18 years.

What does a typical work day look like for you?

"In the outpatient clinic, our mornings are spent administering chemotherapy and transfusions to patients, as well as performing procedures like lumbar punctures for the 20 to 40 patients we see each day in treatment. Our afternoons are focused on case management, which includes booking tests and follow-up appointments. It's also the time when we are available to our families. They know they can reach us to answer questions, or just to talk."

What do you look forward to the most when you arrive at work each day?

"I look forward to seeing the kids. You become part of their family and there is a mutual bond that develops between us. You watch these patients grow on their journey and you celebrate the milestones together.

People always ask me how I'm able to work with children who have cancer. It is because I'm inspired by the strong and resilient patients. I truly believe in miracles because I see them all the time in my patients."

We are fundraising to renovate the Oncology Clinic. What would you say to encourage someone to donate?

"Kids need to be kids. The clinic is a place where patients can play with other kids while receiving treatment. Families also interact with other families who are going through similar situations. It's a place that brings people together, and we need a bigger space that better addresses the needs of patients based on age groups. Donations will help make the clinic more comfortable and efficient for patients, families and staff."



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Transporting Critically Ill Newborns

A pregnancy can be one of the happiest yet most stressful times for parents. When a newborn is critically ill, that stress is magnified a hundredfold. Neonatal specialists at McMaster Children's Hospital lend their expertise and dedication to families like this every day.

The Neonatal Transport Team is comprised of nurses with advanced training in neonatal stabilization. Two transport nurses can be dispatched to community hospitals throughout the region 24 hours a day, seven days a week to care for critically ill newborns and bring them to McMaster Children's Hospital by ambulance.

"The patients can be infants born very prematurely, as early as 23 weeks' gestation, to full-term babies that are up to 28 days old who require stabilization and transfer to a specialized centre like we have here," says Deb Bernard, Clinical Leader of the Neonatal Transport Team.

Respiratory distress is one of the most common reasons why the team is contacted for transport to McMaster Children's Hospital, home to the largest Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) in Ontario.

"The team uses a special 'transporter' when dispatched to stabilize a patient," explains Deb. "The transporter is essentially a hospital on wheels that is equipped with an incubator, ventilator and all of the necessary monitors and medications required to care for critically ill newborns."

Last year, the Neonatal Transport Team fielded more than 750 calls from community hospitals, with more than 600 infants requiring transport services.

"It's exciting to be a part of a team that's able to help some of our most vulnerable patients and make a difference in lives that are just starting out."

2018 Donor Report Now Available

Our donors and partners make a vital difference for patients and families across south-central Ontario. The *2018 Donor Report* features stories about how donors have helped purchase leading-edge equipment, enhance clinical spaces, support innovative research and enable continuing education for staff.

Visit hamiltonhealth.ca/2018report to view the report online, or request a print copy by contacting our office at 905-522-3863 or info@hamiltonhealth.ca.



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