



# SPECIAL DOCTORS GIVE SPECIAL CARE

UROLOGISTS HELP A TODDLER OVERCOME A RARE CONDITION

**LAST OCTOBER, WHITNEY** Adams, a home health aide, picked up her son, Malik Oliver, at day care. Malik, then just 15 months old, had a fever and breathing problems, and doctors at the local hospital thought he was suffering from a urinary tract infection. That day, however, Malik was in particularly rough shape. “His breathing was really bad, and his belly was really big and tight,” says Adams, who lives in Mt. Vernon with her fiancé and Malik’s father, Pyron Oliver, and their other son, also named Pyron, who is 5.

She took Malik back to the hospital, where a CT (computed tomography) scan revealed a large mass on his kidney. An ambulance was summoned to take Malik and his mom to Maria Fareri Children’s Hospital at Westchester Medical Center. Further testing uncovered bad news: Malik had a rare kidney cancer called Wilms’ tumor. This tumor primarily affects children between the ages of 2 and 4, says Paul Zelkovic, M.D., the pediatric urologist who took on Malik’s case. There are only about 500 new cases a

year. “We see one or two a year, and some years we see none,” says Dr. Zelkovic.

But Malik’s case was rarer still in that, while Wilms’ usually affects just one kidney, he had large tumors on *both* kidneys. The right kidney was entirely overtaken by a malignant mass, while the left was about 75 percent cancerous. “There are five different stages of Wilms’, and he was at stage five—the highest,” says Dr. Zelkovic, who recalls Malik as “very near the top of the list” of the worst cases he has ever seen.

But Malik also had another unusual condition called Denys-Drash Syndrome. That meant that his cancer coincided with a malformed urethra and undescended testicles. All these conditions are genetic in nature. "That syndrome is very, very uncommon," Dr. Zelkovic says.

The first line of treatment for Wilms' tumor is chemotherapy to shrink the masses. But Dr. Zelkovic, his partners Israel Franco, M.D., and Edward Reda, M.D. (both pediatric urologic surgeons) and Oya Levendoglu-Tugal, M.D., (one of the hospital's pediatric hematology/oncology specialists), worried that the cancer would be too extensive to save any kidney tissue for Malik. "I was very skeptical from the beginning about whether we could salvage even part of a kidney," says Dr. Levendoglu-Tugal. "Fortunately we were able to save one-third of his left kidney."

Chemotherapy played a vital part in preserving Malik's kidney function, and surgery was the next step, for which Malik was fortunate to have Drs. Zelkovic, Franco and Reda. Like Dr. Levendoglu-Tugal, they know the kidneys thoroughly and are steeped in the special needs of children. "We have good success preserving kidney function," says Dr. Zelkovic. "That comes from surgical skill and having close working relationships with our anesthesiologists, Intensive Care Unit specialists and the other services at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital."

The three surgeons worked together, taking turns during the nearly 10-hour procedure. "With a complex case like this, we need a team approach in which we work

with the oncologists and other specialists," Dr. Zelkovic explains. They removed the right kidney and then delicately extricated the cancerous top two-thirds of the left kidney. They repaired the bottom third of the left kidney and restored blood flow to its tissue. Samples from surrounding tissues confirmed that the doctors had removed all the cancer and that it had not spread to the lymphatic system or other organs. They also repaired Malik's malformed urethra and testicles.

Remarkably, his kidney function came back strong. "He needed only one day on dialysis," Dr. Zelkovic says.

Today, Malik is a happy, healthy 2-year-old, says his mom. "He's funny, real active, and runs around all day," she says.

Malik is on several medications to prevent infections and correct electrolyte imbalances resulting from his undersized kidney. He most likely will be on some medications the rest of his life, and will be monitored closely for cancer recurrence, which Dr. Zelkovic says is rare in such cases but possible, and for high blood pressure and other kidney-related problems. He won't be able to play contact sports. But that's a small price to pay given the genetic hand he was dealt.

That Malik's kidney function was spared is a remarkable tribute to collaboration among highly trained specialists. "I've been doing this for 20-plus years and have never seen a case like this," says Dr. Levendoglu-Tugal. "It is really exciting to help a child with a very rare disease and see him do well. It's very gratifying." —D.L.

## A PIONEER IN ROBOTIC SURGERY FOR CHILDREN

When the da Vinci surgical robot came on the scene in the mid-1990s, most surgeons considered it strictly an adult-oriented technology. Westchester Medical Center, one of the first centers in the tri-state region to own one, bought its first da Vinci for adult bariatric (weight-loss) surgery. But Israel Franco, M.D., a pediatric urologic surgeon at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital, immediately saw the potential for using it on children.

"I had read that some surgeons were using the robot for pyeloplasty," he says, referring to a common procedure to open up a blocked urinary tract. "The robot became available to me, so I started doing them too." He became one of the first pediatric surgeons in the country to adopt the technology, and he is now an internationally recognized expert in pediatric robotic surgery.

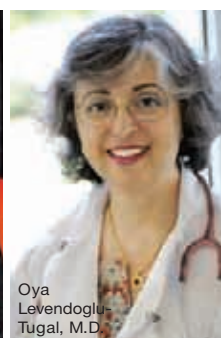
The da Vinci is now used for many types of surgery on children's kidneys, bladders and other urological structures, says Dr. Franco. He established several robotic surgery techniques and has published four papers on the subject in medical journals and a chapter in a medical textbook.

"Many hospitals perform robotic surgery now, but we were among the first," he says.

Fate challenged young Malik Oliver with a difficult set of medical circumstances, but after treatment by a team of specialists at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital at Westchester Medical Center, he's feeling much better today.



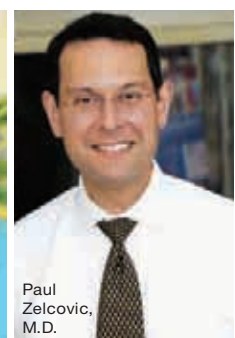
Malik Oliver



Oya Levendoglu-Tugal, M.D.



Israel Franco, M.D.



Paul Zelkovic, M.D.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE TREATMENT OF UROLOGICAL PROBLEMS AT MARIA FARERI CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AT WESTCHESTER MEDICAL CENTER, PLEASE CALL 877.WMC.DOCS OR VISIT WESTCHESTERMEDICALCENTER.COM/MFCH.



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