

I Need a What?

How a Liver Transplant Saved This 13-Year-Old's Life

Last August, Tabitha Hogan was a typical 13 year old, swimming, hanging out with friends and enjoying summer vacation. She seemed perfectly healthy except for a bout with constipation that was causing a stomach ache.

"I didn't think anything of it at first but when she didn't seem to be getting better, I took her to the doctor," says Tabitha's mother, Christine Hogan. "They thought it was her appendix and sent us to Maria Fareri Children's Hospital."



Tabitha Hogan

That was August 16, 2007. Two weeks later, Tabitha received a life-saving liver transplant at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital at Westchester Medical Center, one of only a handful of hospitals in New York State that performs solid organ transplants in children.



Pediatric Liver Transplant Surgeon Dr. Manuel Rodriguez is surrounded by five girls who underwent life-saving liver transplant surgery at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital in the last six months of 2007.

Tabitha was one of five girls ranging in age from six months to 18 years who received liver transplants at the Children's Hospital during the last six months of 2007.

Children come to Maria Fareri Children's Hospital needing transplants for a variety of reasons, including congenital malformations of the liver; metabolic disorders, cirrhosis from autoimmune disease or intestinal failure, liver tumors, and liver failure.

All transplant candidates go through an extensive evaluation to determine the severity of the liver disease and its progression using imaging studies, liver biopsies and extensive blood testing.

Dr. Manuel Rodriguez, Director of Pediatric Liver Transplant, says managing children with liver disease is "a delicate balancing act." That's because doctors don't want to rush into surgery, but they also don't want to wait so long that other organs become damaged.

Tabitha's journey began when an x-ray revealed that her bowel was pressing against the spleen, which was enlarged. Within days, specialists at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital had diagnosed the problem: Tabitha had a rare, autoimmune disorder that causes the body to attack its own liver.

continued on page 4

continued from page 3



Members of the liver transplant team gather for a reunion with recent patients.

Tabitha was placed on the waiting list for a donor liver; while her father went through the workup necessary to determine if he could donate a portion of his liver.

During this time, the transplant team, including surgeons, hepatologists, nutritionists, child life specialists, gastroenterologists, social workers and nurse coordinators, worked to maintain Tabitha's health and prepare her and her family for the transplant.

"Specialists were in and out of her room all day long," says Christine. "And the nurses were wonderful!"

Then the call came. Just two weeks after entering the hospital, a donor organ became available for Tabitha on August 30. The following day, Tabitha emerged from surgery with a new liver that surgeons expect will give her a normal lifespan.

Despite the seriousness of Tabitha's illness, Christine says she and her husband, John, "never feared for her life. The doctors were so calm and reassuring; they never let us panic or get scared."

By Halloween, Tabitha had returned to school, a month ahead of schedule. For now, the budding author, who has had a short story published in an Anthology of student writers, is taking it easy.

She is also reconsidering her future career. Having once thought she would like to write, Tabitha says she is now thinking about nursing as a career because of the tremendous care she received from the nurses at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital.

For more information about liver transplant at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital at WMC, visit www.worldclassmedicine.com/liver