Coming full circle

Donations from an Aflac DSC support a center that developed treatment to care for her son’s rare illness
Jennifer Hendricks-Fogg never imagined needing the services of the Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorders Center, a place she has supported through her commission statement since she started at Aflac in 2013.

But, things changed for the Aflac District Sales Coordinator in late 2016 when she learned first-hand that the research being conducted at the Aflac Cancer Center would be used to treat her newborn son.

Jennifer and Kevin Fogg of Scotia, N.Y., were told their unborn son Logan had fluid on his brain during an ultrasound when she was 34 weeks pregnant. “Within a week, they ordered an MRI and found a brain bleed,” the first-time mother said. “Logan had a fairly large hemorrhage on his brain. I got a call that evening from the doctor saying I needed to check into labor and delivery for more tests.”

Logan was delivered via C-section Nov. 18, 2016. After running a slew of tests, doctors discovered that the hemorrhage on his brain was gone but a tumor one-third the size of his head was in his brain. He was immediately admitted into the prenatal intensive care unit at the Melodies Center for Childhood Cancer and Blood Disorders at Albany Medical Center in upstate New York.

Two days after the diagnosis, a biopsy was performed on the tumor, and Jennifer and Kevin were told their son had a congenital glioblastoma, a cancerous brain tumor.
“A glioblastoma is very common in adult patients, but it is very rare in children, and even more rare in infants,” said Matthew Adamo, MD, Associate Professor of Neurosurgery and Pediatrics at Albany Medical College.

Logan is the first infant Dr. Adamo has treated with a glioblastoma. In the literature, there are only a handful of cases reported in the country.

“It’s so overwhelming,” Jennifer said. “When you find out, you’re like, ‘Why me?’ I stopped asking that quickly, though, because I knew it was for a reason. I couldn’t have a pity party. I couldn’t be upset about it. I just had to ask, ‘What do we do to fix it?’”

Logan had two shunts implanted in his head to help alleviate pressure from the fluid on his brain, and within 10 days of his diagnosis, Logan started chemotherapy. “The first round of chemo he handled like a champ,” said Jennifer.

In the months that followed, Logan underwent four rounds of very aggressive chemotherapy and 11 surgeries, including two major craniotomies performed by Dr. Adamo that took between four and six hours each to complete in order to remove large percentages of the tumor. He spent nearly 140 days in the hospital.

In the most recent MRI, there were no signs of the tumor, which Jennifer said is phenomenal. “But, we aren’t out of the woods. We still have a very long road ahead of us. Logan has one round of aggressive inpatient chemo, then he’s going to have eight rounds of outpatient chemo—those are about 40 to 50 days each—so he’s going to get chemo for another 14 to 15 months.”

“He’s so strong and resilient,” Jennifer added. “Everything Logan has been through, you or I couldn’t handle. He has a lot of fight in him and we fight for him. At the end of the day, I look at that face and we just can’t give up.”
The protocol developed to treat Logan’s cancer was created by a team of doctors and researchers at the Aflac Cancer Center in Atlanta, Ga.—the same center Jennifer had been supporting through her commission statement.

Utilizing the Children’s Oncology Group (COG) network that connects pediatric cancer centers across the country, Lauren Winetraub, MD, Hematologist and Oncologist at the Melodies Center, reached out to Anna Janss, MD, PhD, Associate Professor at Emory University School of Medicine and Neuro-oncologist at the Aflac Cancer Center, after learning her team had treated patients with glioblastomas. “She pulled from their prior experiences and helped me develop the best treatment plan for Logan so that we didn’t have to start from scratch,” Dr. Weintraub said. “Having these resources is invaluable.”

“These are very rare cases and we have local experts, but it’s nice to be able to talk to experts in other parts of the country to come up with a comprehensive plan to give these kids the best outcomes,” added Dr. Adamo.

It is critical that doctors work together to provide the best care possible for patients with a challenging cancer diagnosis. “We have been able to share our knowledge with pediatric cancer doctors throughout the country to help kids like Logan,” said Douglas K. Graham, MD, PhD, Director and Daniel P. Amos Chair of the Aflac Cancer Center and Chief of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology/BMT at Emory University. “We are very thankful for the gifts we have received from the Aflac Field Force that have allowed us to invest in advancing cancer research and treatment.”

Jennifer and Kevin are also grateful for the donations she and others give to the Aflac Cancer Center. “Everyone who has ever donated, I just want to say thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Without those funds, there wouldn’t be research, and without that research, there wouldn’t have been a protocol developed to help our son,” Jennifer said. “It’s very unfortunate that only 4 percent of federal funding goes toward childhood cancer research. But, with efforts at the Aflac Cancer Center, I know that one day we will find a cure for this awful disease.”

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