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Navigating the Unknown: Life with Sickle Cell



Sisters Erin, 10, and Lauren, 8, have been a part of the La Rabida family for their entire lives. After they were each diagnosed with sickle cell shortly after birth, Erin and Lauren's parents knew that they needed to find a team who could help them understand this disease. That's when they arrived at La Rabida.

Before her daughters were born, Bes'cee didn't know anything about sickle cell. "We didn't know what we were facing," explained Bes'cee. "We initially came to La Rabida after we had our first daughter, Erin. I knew I needed to find a hospital that specialized in sickle cell care and La Rabida was that place."

Sickle cell disease is a genetic condition that affects the hemoglobin molecule in red blood cells that deliver oxygen to the body. Those with sickle cell disease have blood cells that are formed in a curved, sickle shape. The sickle-shaped cells have difficulty passing through small blood vessels and can block blood flow, resulting in pain crises and anemia.

Managing life with sickle cell can be challenging, but our team is dedicated to helping kids like Erin and Lauren thrive. "They always asked me if I was comfortable with what they were doing versus telling me what they were going to do. That shows their compassion," said Bes'cee. "Every time I had a question or concern, they would give me an answer. And if they didn't know the answer right away, they would find the answer and bring it back to me. I always appreciated that."

After 10 years as patients, Erin, Lauren, and their family are heading off to start a new chapter in Georgia. Before they left, they made sure to stop by the hospital one last time to say goodbye. "[La Rabida] made us feel comfortable and held my hand through each and every step," shared Bes'cee. "La Rabida has been our anchor during the battle against this disease. I can't thank you all enough."

Feeling the Love on Valentine's Day



The Gem on the Lake was filled with love this Valentine's Day thanks to our friends at SHE 100.3 and Holiday Heroes!

SHE 100.3 hosted their annual Valentine's Day card drive for La Rabida and encouraged their listeners to create thoughtful, handmade valentines with our patients in mind. After properly quarantining the cards to prevent the spread of germs, our team distributed the cards to our kids across the hospital.

Due to COVID-19 Holiday Heroes couldn't host their annual Valentine's Day celebration for our patients and their families, but they still helped make it a day to remember! Holiday Heroes put together Valentine's Day themed activity boxes filled with crafts for our kids to enjoy.

Thank you SHE 100.3 and Holiday Heroes for making this Valentine's Day so special for our patients!



Former La Rabida Patient Remembers Experience with Rheumatic Fever



La Rabida has been serving children in Chicago since 1896. Along with the changes, we have gone through a number of ways, but our mission has remained the same. La Rabida has always strived to impact the lives of children, allowing them to live happier and healthier lives. Early on, La Rabida's specialized in treating rheumatic fever and gained international attention for its research that led to the eradication of the disease. We treated hundreds of kids battling this disease – including Betty.

Betty first became a patient at La Rabida after she was diagnosed with rheumatic fever in the 1950s. "I was very lethargic when I first arrived and couldn't do much for weeks," shared Betty. "But my mom took the CTA and visited me every day."

At just eight years old, Betty spent the majority of the 3rd grade in the hospital. "I remember the kind tutors, helping me and the other children with reading and math," explained Betty.

After missing so much school, her teachers wanted to hold her back a grade. With the help of La Rabida and our tutors, Betty was able to stay on track. "I was distraught with the idea of being held back," shared Betty. "I attribute the tutoring to helping me advance to 4th grade."

Though it was a challenging period, Betty has a number of fond memories from her time at La Rabida. "I remember Wednesday movie nights. There was an older couple who came every Wednesday evening and showed movies in the hallways. When I was feeling up to it, I started joining that activity every week."

After recovering from rheumatic fever, Betty continued to visit La Rabida for follow up visits until she was 18 years old. "I'll always remember how kind and helpful the staff was and that everyone was always pleasant."

Betty went on to obtain her Ph.D. and worked in the public education sector as a teacher, assistant principal, and literacy developer at Chicago Public Schools along with running a learning center for many years. Now 72, Betty is fully retired and still lives in Chicago with her husband.

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The COVID-19 vaccinations are well underway at the Gem on the Lake. On December 17th, 2020, La Rabida received its first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine and immediately began distributing to our staff. Since then, our dedicated team has been working around the clock to ensure that our staff has the opportunity to receive their doses. Elissa Roop, La Rabida's Infection Prevention and Employee Health Nurse, RN, and various teams across the hospital have taken the lead in making sure the vaccination process runs smoothly and efficiently.

The vaccine rollout was something our team had been preparing for. From ensuring we had all the supplies needed to store and administer the vaccines, creating a distribution and clinic plan, and communicating information about the vaccine to staff, we were ready for the green light from the FDA. "We were not certain when the vaccine would be approved for use, so it was a waiting game," shared Elissa. When the vaccine was finally authorized, it was go time. "We learned on a Monday that we were getting the vaccine, and by Thursday we received and administered our first 50 doses." Since then, La Rabida has administered over 300 doses to staff across the hospital.

This vaccine is different than the traditional flu vaccine because it requires special handling. "The COVID-19 vaccine is only able to be in our refrigerators for five days. There are six vaccines are in a vial and the vial has to be used within six hours after dilution," explained Elissa. This requires thoughtful coordination to ensure that no doses go to waste. "The hardest part was scheduling the vaccine and ensuring people did not miss their appointments since we have to be very meticulous about how we store the vaccine, reconstitute it, and give within a certain amount of time."



The rollout of this new vaccine has kept everyone on their toes and requires support from various teams across the hospital. From our pharmacy, employee health and quality and risk management teams to the purchasing department and the COVID-19 vaccine distribution has been a team wide effort. "It was definitely a quick process, from learning we were getting the vaccine, scheduling staff, and then finding out the best schedule for our COVID vaccine clinics, but working with a great team has helped make this process run smoothly," shared Elissa.

After receiving the vaccine herself, Elissa feels a sense of hope. "I received both doses of the vaccine. At first, like everyone, I was a little nervous to receive it because it was so new, but after doing my research and hearing from experts about the vaccine, I decided that this was the best way to not only protect myself but also my family, my co-workers, and patients," said Elissa.

To recognize all the hard work put into the vaccine distribution process, Elissa was awarded the Heart of the Quarter and the Employee Health team was recognized as La Rabida's Exceptional Team. It is because of their commitment that our staff is protected in the fight against COVID-19.

Make Your Gift Go Farther

Make a gift today and for the future. Are you already making annual gifts to support the work of La Rabida? Consider adding a planned gift this year. Increase the impact of your giving, provide greater tax savings, preserve wealth for you and your family and help continue our work in the future.

To learn more, please contact Anne Wilson, Individual Giving Officer at awilson@larabida.org or 773.256.5718.

