

Newman Memorial Hospital Sponsors Walk for MS Awareness

Candi Helfenbein was only 27 when she first began to experience symptoms that indicated there may be a problem. One of the initial symptoms was a visual disturbance, or “something going on with the eyes that just isn’t right”. Throughout the next 20 years she had various symptoms that came and went, but never could get a diagnosis. She was told there was nothing wrong, it was all in her head. It wasn’t until 2015 when she had visual changes in her left eye that Dr. Jones of Northwest Eye Associates saw her and shared his suspicion that this may be a result of Multiple Sclerosis. He got her in to see a specialist and within a month she had her answer to the mysterious symptoms that had plagued her for the last two decades.....Multiple Sclerosis or MS.

According to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, MS is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system that disrupts the flow of information within the brain and between the brain and the body. The cause of MS is still unknown, but scientists believe the disease is triggered by as-yet-unidentified environmental factor(s) in a person who is genetically predisposed to respond. The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted. Most people with MS are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 50, with two to three times more women than men being diagnosed with the disease.

In MS, damage to the myelin coating around nerve fibers in the brain interfere with the transmission of nerve signals between the brain, spinal cord and the rest of the body. These disrupted signals cause the symptoms of MS, which vary from one person to another and over time for any given person, depending on where the damage occurs. This makes the symptoms very unpredictable. No two people have exactly the same symptoms, and each person’s symptoms can change or fluctuate over time. That being said, some of the more common symptoms include: fatigue, difficulty with walking and/or balance, numbness or tingling, spasticity (stiffness and involuntary muscle spasms most commonly in the legs), weakness, vision problems, dizziness, bladder and/or bowel problems, pain, changes in cognitive skills, emotional changes and depression. Less common symptoms include speech and swallowing problems, tremor, seizures, breathing problems, headaches and hearing loss.

Ms. Helfenbein has been for an evaluation with a physician in Chicago. They are currently treating her symptoms with medication. The long range plan, however, is to undergo a treatment called Hematopoietic Stem Cell Transplant (HSCT). According to Dr. Burt, M.D. at North Western University in Chicago, this is the only existing scientifically proven treatment, currently available that completely halts disease progression. Ms. Helfenbein states that the cost of the treatment will be around \$57,000. She is relying on saving and fundraising in order to raise the capital to pursue this treatment course.

That's where her daughter, Sadi Long, stepped in to help. "My mom has done a few fundraisers, but I really wanted to do one that served two purposes. Of course, I want to help my mom raise money for her treatment. But I also want to raise awareness of the disease itself. Because the symptoms can be so different from one person to another, some people like my mom don't get diagnosed for a long time. The earlier someone is diagnosed, the earlier the earlier they can get treatment." Sadi went on to say, "I want people to know my mom's story so that more people will be aware of MS and maybe even recognize symptoms in themselves or a loved one earlier." To learn more about Candi Helfenbein's story, visit <http://www.youcaring.com/candi-helfenbein-677518> or visit Newman Memorial Hospital's Facebook page to find a link. Through the link you can get information on the upcoming MS Awareness Walk, print a registration page or make a donation to Candi Helfenbein.

The walk is scheduled for March 18, 2017 with a registration deadline of February 15th. It will start and end at Newman Memorial with refreshments provided afterwards. If you have any questions, please contact Sadi Long at 580-571-1925.