

Our Hero: Commitment to finding a cure for Juvenile Diabetes

BY GREGG TERRY

When I first heard the pediatric endocrinologist say that our four-year-old son, Ryan, was diagnosed with juvenile, or type 1 diabetes, I was blown away. He had no symptoms, and, for that matter, he was hardly ever sick! It was discovered three days earlier in a routine urine test at his fourth year “well visit”. How can this healthy little boy have such a devastating, life-long illness? Denial, along with an overwhelming desire to help my son, sent me on a crusade through a myriad of journals and websites—as well as reaching out to industry contacts to get the answers to all of my questions. I realized how fortunate I was to work in the pharmaceutical industry during this time.

MORE ANSWERS, MORE QUESTIONS

I spoke to endocrinologists at several Joslin Centers for Diabetes Research, including Miami and Boston. I had physicians offer their home phone number in the event I had additional questions or concerns. My wife, Debra, Ryan, and I traveled to Children’s Hospital in Philadelphia and met with the Chief of Pediatric Endocrinology who confirmed, as did all the other physicians, that indeed Ryan had juvenile diabetes.

The level of devastation we felt as parents having a child diagnosed with a chronic life-threatening disease cannot be explained. The only thing we could do was to help insure Ryan’s health through a well-planned diabetes management program.

HEALTHY EVERY DAY

Our management program included multiple blood tests—five to six (on the average) every day. It also included four to five insulin injections every day.

In addition, our new routine meant educating all our friends and family, as well as teachers, and coaches—in short, anyone who cared for Ryan—about the disease and the consequences of varying blood sugar levels. We learned that diabetes is 24/7, no days off. It is an incredible burden for anyone to have to accept, especially at four years of age.

TODAY IS TOMORROW

It has been almost eight-and-a-half years since Ryan was diagnosed. (He was first diagnosed in 1996.) Ryan is now a seventh grader and excels at anything he puts his mind to. He plays hockey year ‘round, as well as soccer and basketball. He also enjoys snowboarding and surfing. His school work is perfect (with, of course, the occasional 12-year-old attitude). Most impressively, Ryan volunteers his time to help raise awareness for a cure for juvenile diabetes.

INCREASING AWARENESS

Ryan currently appears in a national Public Service Announcement (PSA) with diabetes spokeswoman Mary Tyler Moore. The PSA appears on all of the major networks, as well as CNN and Lifetime. The PSA is called *Tomorrow*, in recognition to the inspiring song from the Broadway show *Annie*.

Ryan also performed a voice-over for a Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) video appealing to congress to support research for a cure. He will also be featured in an upcoming JDRF video for newly-diagnosed children, talking about his personal experiences as a child living with diabetes. It is being created to give hope to these children and their families. He was chosen, undoubtedly, because of his positive attitude and outlook on life.

A STAR ATTITUDE

In addition, Ryan has had numerous photo shoots for JDRF campaigns, including one with Proctor & Gamble™ and one with the national JDRF “Walk to Cure Diabetes” spokesperson, actor Kevin Kline.

Besides his on-camera work, Ryan has spoken in person before large audiences. As this is a difficult task for many adults, you can imagine how proud we are to see our twelve-year-old Ryan having such confidence at his young age!

Ryan was also interviewed at a recent JDRF Annual Black Tie gala co-chaired by Debra. He appeared on the stage in front of over 500 attendees. Ryan spoke about his day-to-day life and how incredible it would be to be diabetes free. This was followed by the “Fund a Cure”



One of Ryan’s favorite hobbies: fishing



Ryan playing soccer

portion of the program, where attendees made generous donations. The gala raised over \$650,000 that year.

Ryan also introduced members of the New York Giants football team to a group of 300 at a juvenile diabetes fund raiser in Rumson, New Jersey. The program, sponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), raised funds for research.

A SPECIAL BOY

Ryan's picture will be appearing on a JDRF website appealing to congress to help fund brain stem cell

research to find a cure for life-threatening diseases. He has also applied for an opportunity to appear before congress next June to help with an appeal for the research.

To say that Ryan has contributed to helping this cause is an understatement. Within the last two years, he has learned to use an insulin pump to help him maintain tighter control of his diabetes, as well as to postpone future complications of this disease. He has even convinced diabetic adults to go on insulin pump therapy.

As Ryan's father, I am extremely proud of him and his efforts in helping to find a cure for juvenile diabetes. I hope that he, and children like him, will benefit from a cure, soon.

You can find out more about diabetes and juvenile diabetics in particular at www.diabetes.org, the main site for the American Diabetes Association, as well as www.jdrf.org, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation website, and www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/juvenilediabetes.html, for information and facts from the National Institutes of Health.

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