

Clock ticks on toddler's life

Three-year-old with leukemia needs bone marrow match

BY KATERI WOZNY

Magnus Kalins is a typical energetic toddler; he loves playing with his Legos, with Disney's "Cars" on a race-track and with his sand and water table.

"To get all his energy out, we sometimes even pull out the futon couch and pad it so he can run, wrestle and have pillow fights," said Anna Kalins, Magnus' mother.

With such a fun, loving spirit, no one would imagine that anything is wrong with Magnus. However, in late June, he was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia called Juvenile Myelomonocytic Leukemia, one of three types of children's leukemias.

JMML is difficult to treat, and a bone marrow transplant is the only cure. Sadly, no one in Magnus' family is a perfect match. If left untreated, he might not make it to see his 5th birthday.

Early signs

Shortly after Easter, the Kalins family noticed Magnus had severe bruising on his shins and petechiae (broken capillaries). After visiting their local pediatrician, they discovered that Magnus had an abnormal white blood cell count, and he was later admitted to Ventura County Hospital, followed by Children's Hospital Los Angeles for a platelet transfusion, all within an eight-hour span.

"We were just so concerned and wanted answers," Anna said.

At the time of his diagnosis, Magnus' platelet count was 14,000, while a healthy person's is more than 150,000.

"The doctors were amazed that he has so much energy and that he showed no other symptoms (of JMML)," Anna said.

Although the family was devastated to hear the news, they immediately began taking steps to make sure Magnus stays healthy. Currently, he needs a blood transfusion every seven to 10 days and is also on a low dose chemotherapy drug called 6-Mercaptopurine (or 6-MP), which he takes twice a day.

"Magnus only has skin reactions from the medications," Anna said. "And when we take him to the hospital, we explain to him that the doctors are trying to fix his blood."

Taking precautions

Magnus is limited in what he can do throughout an average day, such as playing outside, interacting with his peers or going to the grocery store due to the chance of catching a virus. If he takes walks with his family, he

must be in a stroller. His mother and father also keep a constant eye on him to keep him from falling or bumping himself due to the risk of hemorrhaging.

"He caught a cold from my mom and he was admitted to the ER for four days with a 106 degree fever," said Erik, Magnus' father. "We take precautions."

Magnus also takes a bath every day with Epsom salt to draw out toxins and has little contact with his 3-month-old sister, Zane.

"We have to keep everything separate. It's hard when he hears his baby sister cry and he wants to help," Anna explained. "We have Lysol wipes and hand sanitizers everywhere. We also do laundry and wash dishes daily."

Community steps up

Upon hearing the news of Magnus' illness, many friends and neighbors have reached out to help the Kalins with chores such as cleaning their house and fixing them dinners. The Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation is also helping by giving the Kalins family a grant, gas gift cards and promoting a series of fundraisers that will take place next month throughout Southern California.

"We're overwhelmed with the support from the community and are very thankful and blessed," Anna said.

Dr. John Zemjanis, family practitioner at Beach Medical Clinic and Magnus' grandfather, has also been going the distance to help his grandson. Over the past few months, he has reached out to experts who know more about JMML, such as doctors at U.C. San Francisco and University of Minnesota. "They offer great support and advice," he said. "I am very grateful to those who have been willing to communicate with me."

Match 4 Magnus

Teddy Bear is also working closely with Be The Match, a nonprofit that recruits bone marrow donors. Donors that are 18- to 44-years-old can register for free with a promo code. Those between the ages of 45 to 60 are asked for a donation of \$100 to cover the testing costs.

The family is staying strong and hopeful for a donor match. If one is found, it could take up to 90 to 100 days in the hospital to complete the bone marrow transplant.

"We just take it day by day, one step at a time," Anna said.

Can't attend one of the fundraiser events? Visit join.bethematch.org and enter promo code MATCH-4MAGNUS if you are between the ages of 18 to 44.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Magnus Kalins, a lively 3-year-old, is battling a rare form of leukemia. His parents are asking community members to step up in order to find a bone marrow match for Magnus.

Are you a match for Magnus?

Find out at one of these donor testing events

Sept. 13: Island Brewing Company
5049 6th St., 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Free pint of beer to whoever registers

Sept. 14: 5 W. Cabrillo Blvd.
(next to the pier entrance) 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Sept. 20: Ventura Family YMCA,
3760 Telegraph Road, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Sept. 21: LA: Latvian Community Center Los Angeles, 1955 Riverside Dr., 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.