

*“UNLEASH YOUR PASSION FOR LIONISM WITH KINDNESS,
WHILE EMBRACING DIVERSITY”*

CHILDHOOD CANCER – August 2020

It’s been 20 years since I heard the words “I’m so sorry, your child has cancer”, and I can still feel the stab of terror that zapped through my whole being. I vividly remember the stress and worries over the next 7 years, not just about Amanda’s health, but also the tremendous strain on our finances. I also remember the amazing emotional and financial support from family, friends, complete strangers and several very caring nonprofit organizations that helped us through that nightmare.

With that in mind, my heart goes out to families currently facing similar challenges with the added complications of the Covid-19 pandemic. While many of us are getting tired of months of isolation, having to wear masks, having raw hands from constant washing and using hand sanitizer, and some struggling with loss of income, childhood cancer families have been dealing with these issues for years while their child is in treatment and beyond. Treatment protocols can last several years, and too often stretch into 6 or more years due to relapses. Long-term isolation is common due to the child’s compromised immune system. Even very young children frequently have to wear a mask. Many times parents have to quit their job to stay with their sick child. The stories I’ve heard firsthand over the years are truly heartbreaking. Even after treatment, 2/3 of childhood cancer survivors will have long-lasting, chronic conditions from treatments, including heart and lung damage, growth deficits, hearing loss, infertility and second cancers.

And now they have the added fear and stress of a highly contagious virus that would most likely be disastrous for their child and possibly the rest of the family. To make matters worse, they’re cut off from support systems crucial to their ability to cope with this family trauma. Sometimes only one parent can stay in the hospital with their child, and siblings and other family and friends can’t visit. Hospitals and nonprofits that serve these families have had to find new ways to provide support that will minimize the families’ exposure to the coronavirus. Just one challenging aspect has been how to offer toys and play activities for distraction and cheer. At Sacred Heart Children’s Hospital in Spokane, the playroom has been stripped of all toys, books and craft supplies. Some of these items can be delivered to patient rooms on request after being sanitized.

I’ve just touched on some of the challenges these special kids and their families face during “normal” times and the current extraordinary times. For National Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, next month I’ll give additional pediatric cancer statistics and feature a wonderful nonprofit that provides invaluable assistance to Inland NW families.

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