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Hartford native's cancer bout inspires nursing dreams

By Christie Netherton Messenger-Inquirer
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Olivia Miller, a Hartford native and soon-to-be nursing student at WKU, hopes to inspire hope in others with her cancer survival journey.

Miller, a sophomore at WKU, said she will be starting in the school's nursing program next semester, which has been a dream of hers for some time.

At the young age of 3, Miller was diagnosed with kidney cancer.

Her parents took her in for a visit to the pediatrician for fatigue and she was diagnosed with tonsillitis and had her tonsils removed. Within just a few months, however, she then developed pneumonia twice in a four-week period.



Her pediatrician then scheduled an MRI which showed a tumor covering about 60% of her abdomen, she said.

After further review and a biopsy at Norton's Children's Hospital, Olivia was diagnosed with bilateral anaplastic tumor, also known as Wilms tumor on May 5, 2005.

Wilms tumor is the most common type of kidney cancer in children. Also known as nephroblastoma, this type accounts for about 6% of all childhood cancers and originates in the kidney's cells.

However, she said her tumor was rare because it was found outside the walls of her kidney, stitched rather than inside.

Miller went through nine months of treatment and as given less than a 30% chance of survival.

"For nine months, my life was the hospital. I was in Norton's Children's Hospital either for five days out of the week or for three days out of the week and whenever I was home, we didn't go anywhere, we stayed home," she said.

She was able to finish treatment in January, 2006, just less than a year later, but her time spent at Norton's inspired her to pursue a career in health care.

"So coming off of that, I just kind of embraced life and looked at the positives because I had outlasted 30% chance of survival, so I just really wanted to move past it," she said. "Now I'm in college; I'm a sophomore at WKU and I'm starting the nursing program next semester and I'm really excited. Looking at that, I just realize how much stronger I've gotten."

Miller said she was told that, even though she withstood the statistic surrounding her illness, she may still experience learning delays.

She said that was not going to stop her, though.

"I feel really blessed to even be in college. They told me that my learning might be delayed, but I pushed through it and was determined that I'm going to be in college and I'm going to be in the medical field," she said. "I thank God every day and I thank the doctors. That's why I want to be a nurse. I want to go and work at Norton's and help kids. My favorite nurse had cancer when he was a kid and it gave me hope and I want to give hope to other kids as well."

Miller's goal is to one day work as a nurse at Norton's Pediatric Inpatient Cancer Unit at the Children's Hospital where she, herself, was a patient.

She said this would be her way of giving back and paying it forward.

"I originally wanted to be a doctor, but I realized nursing is better for me because you can spend more time with the kids and that's what I want to do; I want to give more hope and be more involved with the kids," she said.

Miller is also involved in a camp for kids with cancer or who have had cancer where she gets to meet with families of other children with cancer to share her story and show that there is hope.

She also serves on the "Dance Big Red" executive board as the family relations chair, working with families to get them more involved with Norton's.

Dance Big Red is a dance marathon hosted each year to help raise funds for Norton's Children's Hospital.

This year is the eighth year of the marathon and will be the first time the event has been held in-person since 2019.

The goal, she said, is to raise \$60,000 for the hospital, which she is optimistic about.

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