



PEDIATRIC TRAUMA

Fighting Back

It's hard to imagine how a lazy summer evening and a rare, but welcome, date night at the movies for Melissa and Cesar Delacruz turned into every parent's worst nightmare within a matter of seconds.

Shown: Jenna Delacruz was struck by a car while crossing the street in her hometown of Dunellen. Thanks to the state's only Pediatric Trauma Center at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, Jenna is back to a normal life and doing great.



THE BRISTOL-MYERS SQUIBB CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital

The Delacruz's daughter, Jenna, who was 12 at the time, was walking to a friend's house just two blocks from her Dunellen home, when she was struck by a car in full view of her grandmother and younger siblings who followed close behind. The driver never saw Jenna and hit her, sending her hurtling to the ground.

"We rarely go out, but we happened to be at the movies when we got the phone call from my mom," says Jenna's mom, Melissa. "My mom saw the whole thing and she was a hysterical mess when we got to the scene. We have never had anything more serious than a broken toe in this family, so to see her lying on the ground was just horrible- it's a mother's worst fear."

Luckily for Jenna and her family, the accident occurred just minutes away from the states only Pediatric Trauma Center at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJ), where a multidisciplinary team of specialists who are experienced in treating traumatic injuries in children that result from accidents like Jenna's, was waiting to take action.

Once they arrived at RWJ, they were met by Adam Shiroff, MD, FACS, Associate Professor of Surgery at Robert Wood Johnson Medical School (RWJMS) and Associate Director of Trauma at RWJ.

"The doctors communicated everything to us," Mrs. Delacruz said. "They explained everything and tried to put us at ease."

According to Dr. Shiroff, when treating injuries like Jenna's, it's important to proceed swiftly, but cautiously, to assess the patient. RWJ's trauma team is skilled and experienced to accomplish both goals.

"It's important to limit movement of the patient when conducting a thorough assessment - our motto is 'no missed injuries,' Dr. Shiroff explains. "Our team is on heightened awareness that life-threatening injuries are present until we have confirmed that they are not."

After performing a series of tests, including a CT-Scan and MRI, doctors determined that Jenna suffered a fracture of the left occipital condyle, more commonly known as the point where the skull meets the first bone of the spine.

"These fractures can be very serious, since the skull is no longer connected to the spine," explains Rachana Tyagi, MD, Associate Professor of Surgery at RWJMS and a pediatric neurosurgeon at RWJ who treated Jenna. "If the skull moves too far in relation to the spine, it can injure the spinal cord as it is leaving the skull and entering the spine, resulting in paralysis or even death."

Jenna was fortunate in that the bone was broken but it remained properly lined up with the skull.

"The MRI and Cat Scan showed that the bone and ligaments were injured, but aligned," Dr. Tyagi says.

Dr. Tyagi and her team placed Jenna in a Halo brace, which is a stiff neck brace that keeps the head and neck stable, allowing the fractured bone to heal.

Both Dr. Tyagi and Dr. Shiroff credit Jenna's positive outcome to the actions of first responders at the scene and the expert care she received at RWJ.

"Everybody has to do their job properly to have a good outcome," Dr. Tyagi notes.

Jenna spent two weeks at The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital before being transferred to PSE&G Children's Specialized Hospital for physical rehabilitation for one month. She spent three months in the Halo before she healed and it was removed.

"The weight of the Halo makes it hard to get up, so when it came off, I literally felt like the weight of the world was lifted off my shoulders," Jenna says.

Jenna is thrilled to be back playing softball and she even took up *Moi Tai* (a form of kick boxing) after the accident. She has gained more confidence and wants to encourage others to overcome similar challenges.

"Don't ever doubt yourself, you may be stronger than you think," she says.

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