PEDIATRIC HEMATOLOGY

Sickle Cell Disease

Being born with severe sickle cell disease has not stopped Pauline Dande from living a full life. With expert care from the Regional Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey and The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's (BMSCH) Hospital at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, and a positive attitude, Ms. Dande has thrived despite pain that made it hard for her to walk or sit, and shortness of breath and lack of energy that prevented her from keeping up with other kids when she was growing up. "I try to overcome whatever I think is impossible and find a way to make it happen," said the 20-year-old North Brunswick, resident, who is now majoring in statistics at Rutgers University.

Sickle cell disease is an inherited blood disorder that makes the red blood cells hard and sticky, and shaped like a sickle. Sickle cells do not live as long as normal round blood cells, which causes anemia. They also get stuck in the blood vessels, clogging the flow of blood and causing pain and sometimes other serious problems such as life-threatening infection and stroke. Sickle cell disease is most common in African-Americans and in Hispanics from the Caribbean. Both parents must have the sickle cell gene for a child to be born with the disease.

During elementary and middle school, Ms. Dande was hospitalized at BMSCH a few times each year, and occasionally during high school, for severe pain and infections. Before starting her freshman year of college in 2011, she started taking Hydrea, a medicine that reduces pain and other problems from sickle cell disease and yet, is not widely used in young people. "Hydrea gave me more energy and really helps me focus in college," said Ms. Dande. "I don't get tired as quickly as I used to."

Richard A. Drachtman. MD, and other doctors at the Regional Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center use Hydrea aggressively. "Cells don't sickle as much when patients take Hydrea. It keeps them out of trouble," said Dr. Drachtman. Hydrea can also prevent problems such as damage to the lungs, heart, and kidneys that happen as children with sickle cell disease get older. Dr. Drachtman is Section Chief, Pediatric Hematology/Oncology at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, and a Professor of Pediatrics at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

Doctors throughout New Jersey refer patients with sickle cell disease to the Regional Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center, which is part of the Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, the state's only National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center. "Through our aggressive approach to treatment and our involvement in research, we provide cutting-edge care," said Dr. Drachtman. The center's clinical trials give patients access to new sickle cell disease treatments being tested, such as drugs to improve blood flow and thus, relieve severe pain.

"Sickle cell disease may seem like it's a heavy burden, but with the right medical attention and a positive attitude, it doesn't hold me back from achieving things in my life," said Ms. Dande.

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

Shown: Pauline Dande has endured a lifetime battle with Sickle Cell disease and is doing well thanks to a groundbreaking new drug made available to her through the Regional Sickle Cell Center. She is now focused on her studies, majoring in statistics at Rutgers University.