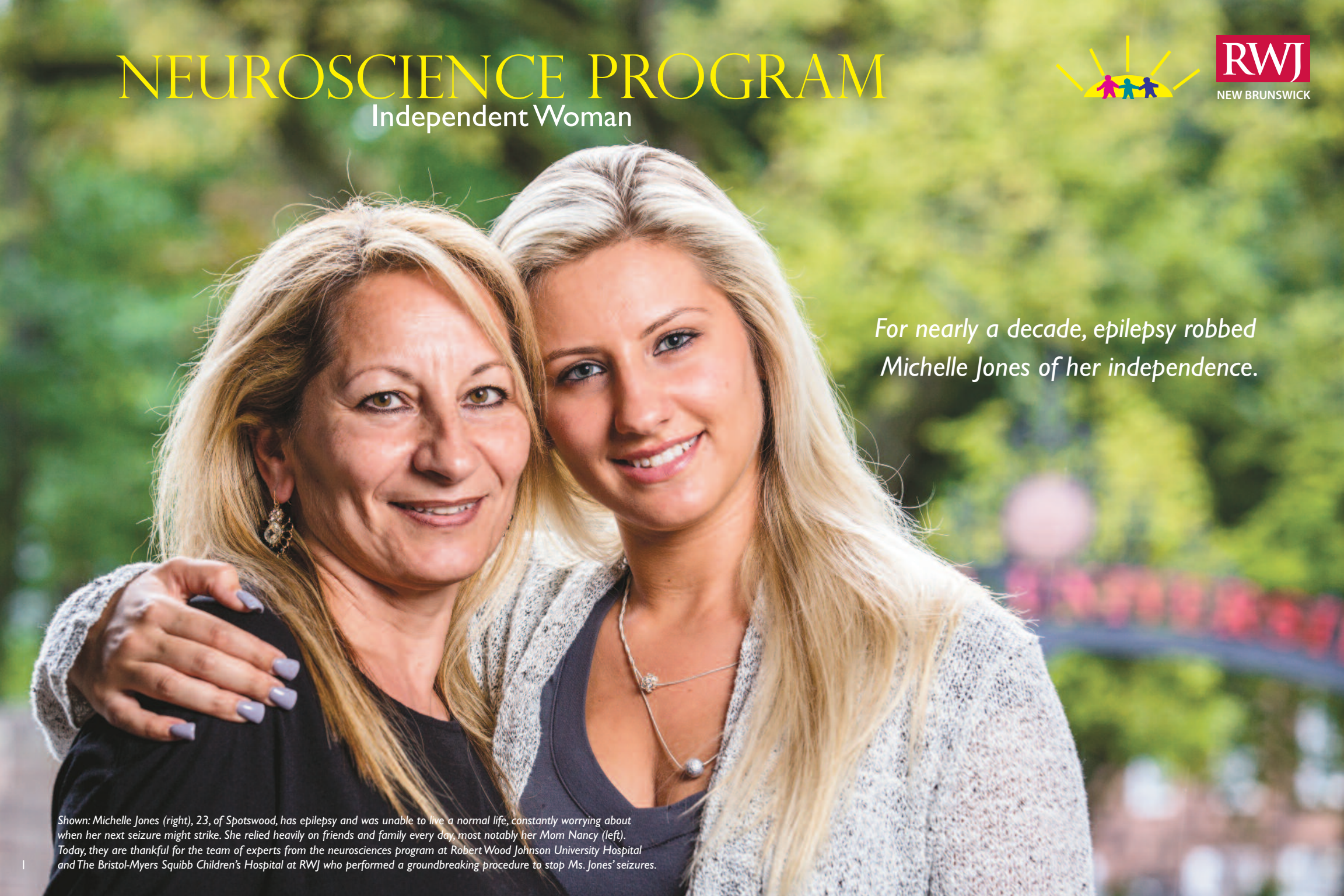
NEUROSCIENCE PROGRAM

Independent Woman

RWJ NEW BRUNSWICK

For nearly a decade, epilepsy robbed Michelle Jones of her independence.



Shown: Michelle Jones (right), 23, of Spotswood, has epilepsy and was unable to live a normal life, constantly worrying about when her next seizure might strike. She relied heavily on friends and family every day, most notably her Mom Nancy (left). Today, they are thankful for the team of experts from the neurosciences program at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital and The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital at RWJ who performed a groundbreaking procedure to stop Ms. Jones' seizures.

The 23-year-old Spotswood resident and Rutgers University student constantly lived in fear of seizures which could place her in harm's way while participating in the most basic activities.

Living with epilepsy meant that she couldn't do many things alone or go on trips with friends. She couldn't drive and she had to notify her professors about her condition so she could receive help if she had a seizure in class.

"Not being able to drive was a real struggle for me. I was robbed of my independence and couldn't live a full life," she said. "I felt I would never experience the freedom to go about my own routine."

Despite her diagnosis, Ms. Jones tried to lead a normal life.

"I had my first job at age 14 and I tried my best to not let it interfere with what I wanted to do," Ms. Jones said.

Now, thanks to the expert care she received from Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (RWJ) and Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School's Clinical Neurophysiology and Epilepsy Center and Neurosurgery teams, Ms. Jones is driving, attending classes and pursuing a degree in communications. She is among the hundreds of individuals who have benefitted from laser ablation technology. Laser ablation is a new minimally-invasive technology that uses light energy to target the area of the brain that causes epileptic seizures. Laser energy is delivered to the target area through a probe that is directed through a three-millimeter hole in the base of the skull. As light is delivered through the probe, temperatures in the target area rise, destroying unwanted tissue and leaving healthy tissue unharmed.

The National Association of Epilepsy Centers has designated RWJ as a Level IV Epilepsy Center. The hospital is a national leader in laser ablation, having performed more procedures than any other institution to treat a broad range of conditions such as brain tumors, chronic pain and epilepsy. RWJ has trained nearly 100 surgeons in the technology's use.

Signs of Ms. Jones' epilepsy surfaced at age 11. "For the first two years I felt auras or what I called 'moments', (preludes to epileptic seizures)," she recalled.

Her diagnosis wasn't confirmed until she experienced a full-blown seizure while on vacation in Florida with her mother and sisters.

"While in bed, her legs began to move and the movement went up her body to her arms. She began to make strange noises," her mother, Nancy Jones, said. "Blood was coming out of her mouth."

After returning home, she was eventually referred to Syed Hosain, MD, Clinical Professor of Pediatric Neurology and Section Chief, Clinical Neurophysiology at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital at RWJ. Dr. Hosain managed Ms. Jones' condition with medication for many years, but cautioned she would need surgery in the future.

"Michelle was apprehensive about having surgery, but her seizures grew more severe," said Shabbar Danish, MD, Chief of Neurosurgical Oncology at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey and Director of Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, who performed Ms. Jones' surgery. "Laser ablation is minimally-invasive surgery. We have done more than 200 procedures, so we have a good sense of our safety profile."

There were no complications following the procedure and Ms. Jones returned home within 24 hours. She has been seizure-free for more than a year.

"One year is a significant milestone and two years is major," Dr. Hosain noted. "Patients remaining seizure-free two years out have a 90-95 percent chance of remaining seizure-free for the rest of their lives."

Laser ablation technology wasn't available when Ms. Jones was first diagnosed. Delaying surgery may have paid off.

"Everything I have done after surgery feels like a first-time experience," Ms. Jones said. "I am finally able to experience a greater quality of life. It's an amazing feeling."

Shown: Syed Hosain, MD, (left) Clinical Professor of Pediatric Neurology and Section Chief, Clinical Neurophysiology at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and The Bristol-Myers Squibb Children's Hospital at RWJ, has cared for and medically managed Ms. Jones' epilepsy for 10 years. He recently referred her to Shabbar Danish, MD, (right) Chief of Neurosurgical Oncology at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey and Director of Stereotactic and Functional Neurosurgery at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School and RWJ, who performed Ms. Jones' laser surgery to stop her seizures.

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