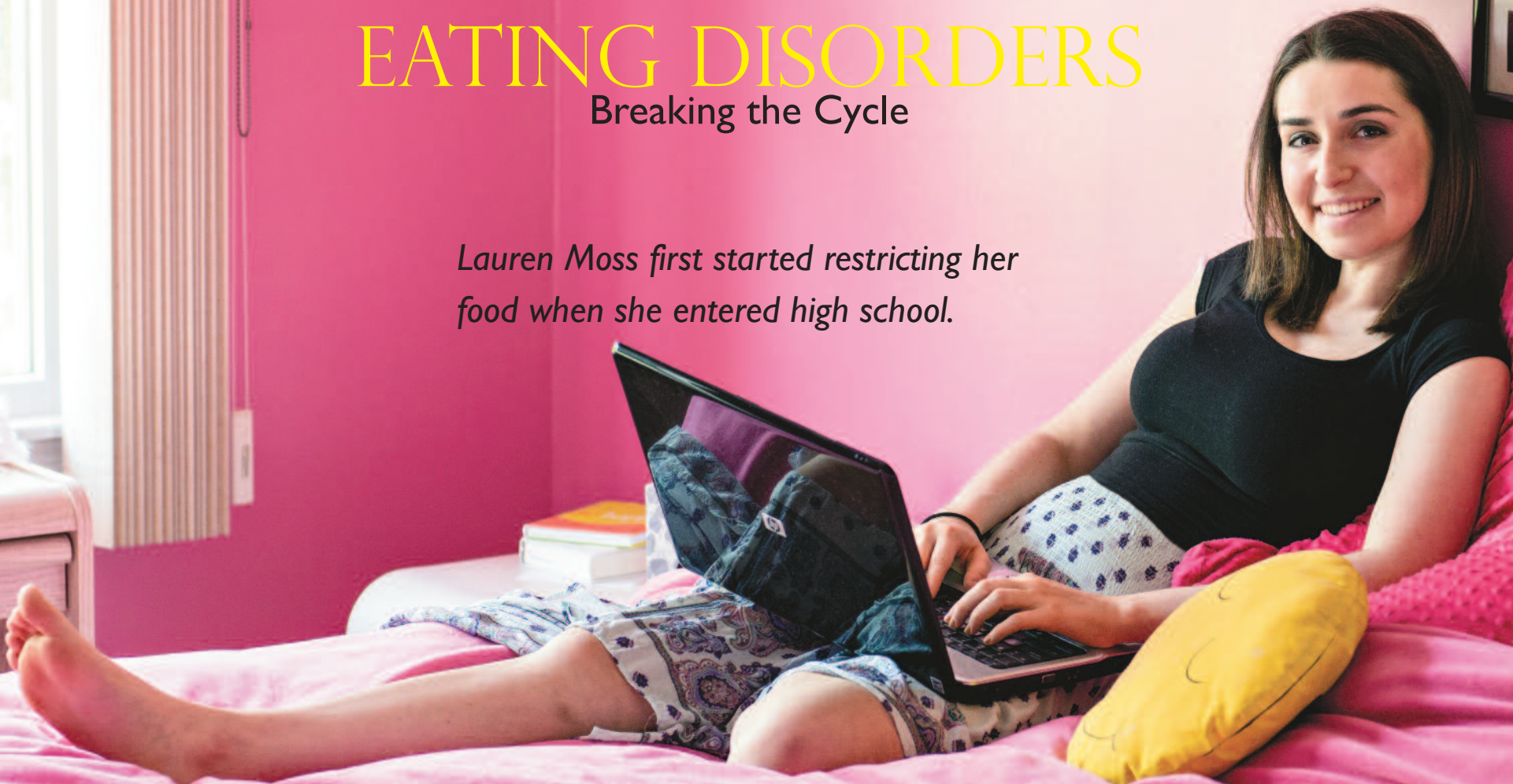


EATING DISORDERS

Breaking the Cycle

Lauren Moss first started restricting her food when she entered high school.



Shown: Lauren Moss was a patient of the Eating Disorders Program at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset. Since receiving treatment, she has gone on to finish high school and attend college where she has plans to become a psychologist.

"I thought if I looked a certain way and was a certain weight, people would like me more," says Lauren, 18, of Bridgewater.

She avoided eating with her family and skipped meals, limiting her calories to about 400-500 calories a day. When she did eat, she would immediately hop on her home exercise bike or elliptical to burn off the calories. By the fall of her sophomore year, she had dropped from 120 to 92 pounds.

Concerned, her parents took Lauren – then 15 years old -- to her pediatrician, who referred her to the Eating Disorders Program at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset in Somerville.

Diagnosed as being anorexic, Lauren was admitted to the hospital, which is one of only two in New Jersey to offer inpatient care for the treatment of eating disorders.

"They saved my life," she says. "I don't know if I ever would have recovered without them."

The Eating Disorders Program offers comprehensive care to address the unique medical and psychological issues faced by patients with eating disorders, including inpatient treatment, a partial hospitalization program, an intensive outpatient program and weekly support groups. The program's multidisciplinary team includes psychiatrists, therapists, registered nurses, nutritionists, occupational therapists, certified teachers and tutors. The program is supported through financial contributions from the Page Hill Foundation and The Provident Bank Foundation.

As many as 10 million females are coping with an eating disorder such as anorexia or bulimia. The teenage years are the most common age when eating disorders develop because teens are going through a time of great change, says Joseph Donnellan, MD, Medical Director of the Eating Disorders Program. Males and adults also suffer from the disease as well.

"It's not about the food. It's about the underlying issues," he says. "They use the food as a mask. It's easier to control the food than the other issues in your life. If you control food, it makes you feel like you are in control of everything else too."

But in reality, Dr. Donnellan says, it is the eating disorder that is in control and that can lead to serious health issues such as heart disease, kidney failure, osteoporosis and even death.

Lauren says the inpatient care at RWJ Somerset was important to help her "break the cycle."

"You have that 24/7 support that you need when you are struggling," she says.

Dietitians educated her on healthy eating habits, stressing the importance of incorporating every food group in her meals. Everything she ate was monitored and recorded. She was weighed daily to determine if she was reaching her weight goals.

One-on-one and group therapy sessions helped her to address her feelings of self-esteem and overcome negative thoughts.

"They made me aware of what was going on in my head," Lauren says. "I learned to think things through."

She began journaling and writing about her feelings. Being with others who were coping with the same illness was also a big help in her recovery process.

"I wasn't alone," she says. "There were other people who felt the same way as me."

After a month in the inpatient unit, Lauren attended the partial hospitalization program, spending her weekdays at the hospital for therapy and then going home evenings and weekends. But a few months after completing the program, she began slipping back to her anorexic ways and turned to the hospital again for help. In May 2012, after a week in the partial hospitalization program, she was admitted to the inpatient unit where she stayed for three weeks. She then returned to the partial hospitalization program to transition back home.

For the next year, Lauren continued to see a therapist to help keep her on the path to recovery. She joined the dance team at Bridgewater-Raritan High School and enjoyed spending more time with her family. She graduated from high school in June and is now a freshman at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. She is majoring in psychology with the goal of working as a therapist to help people with eating disorders, addictions and mental illness.

"I want to do something to help other people," she says. "Helping others gives me great satisfaction."



Show: Joseph Donnellan, MD, Medical Director of the Eating Disorders Program at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset.

Visit www.rwjuh.edu/eatingdisorders or call 1-800-914-9444.

Show below: The Eating Disorders Unit at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset includes inpatient treatment, a partial hospitalization program, an intensive outpatient program and weekly support groups.

