

Zachary Barnes

Lincoln Honored Hero

The first part of October, Zach had started to have some respiratory problem and I just suspected bronchitis or some other kind of respiratory infection. I took him to urgent care and the doctor diagnosed him of bronchitis as I suspected. He was put on a 5 day dose of Zythromax and it helped but it didn't get rid of his cough completely. He continued to have shortness of breath with activities. Like football and walking up the stairs. He complained of "just not feeling right" and fatigue. On October 28 he woke up with a swollen face, he didn't want to eat or drink anything so I took him to the doctor's office that afternoon. The doctor performed a chest x-ray, blood work and a urinalysis. While we were waiting for results for all the tests the doctor came started explaining his blood work: high white blood cell count, low hemoglobin, and low platelet count. They suspected leukemia!



At that moment I did not hear anything else but the word leukemia and my world came crashing down! I literally broke down. The tears came rushing out and I got this incredible rush of fear: fear of losing my son, fear of the treatments he would have to endure and if he was strong enough to go through it all. The doctors stated that they wanted Zachary admitted to St. Elizabeth's immediately for further testing. I looked at Zachary and saw this look of fear and he was crying I immediately pulled myself together and explained to him that he was sick and that the doctors needed to do more testing to find out what was wrong. I explained to him that he might be in the hospital for a while and that it was going to be tough but that I would be there EVERY step of the way!

We stayed in St. Elizabeth's hospital for a couple of hours then they figured out that they wanted a pediatric oncologist/hematologist to see Zachary. Because Lincoln did not have one, we were transferred to Children's Hospital in Omaha that night. The hematologists/oncologist performed the same testing that had been done and confirmed that it was leukemia. A couple days later with further testing - more blood work, a lumbar puncture and a bone marrow biopsy - they narrowed it down to Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. We were informed that he would endure 3 years of treatments. The next few weeks were nothing but testing, surgeries, blood transfusions, chemotherapy, IV antibiotics, and IV antifungals. He has had several lumbar punctures, bone marrow biopsies, a lung biopsy, EEG, Bronchoscopy, Renal ultrasounds, MRI's, CT scans, attempted to have a PICC line placed but was unsuccessful, the doctors finally decided to implant a power port right underneath the skin in his chest.

Zachary went on to have complications including seizures, increased cerebral spinal fluid, high blood pressure, and respiratory problems. The night he had seizures I thought I was going to lose him. I saw him posturing, foaming at the mouth, and not responding to me even with sternal touch. I know with my medical experience that this was not good that something neurological was going on! Eventually after having his cerebral spinal fluid drained twice and blood pressure medications his blood pressures finally leveled out. Luckily he did not have anymore seizures other than that one night. Then the respiratory problems started. They performed a bronchoscopy and a lung biopsy and put Zach in isolation in case it was tuberculosis. While they waited for results from the lung biopsy and bronchoscopy he was put on IV antibiotics and then IV antifungals. They figured out that he had sacs in his lungs that were filled with fungus. Finally December 2nd he was discharged from inpatient to outpatient! Since then he has had more lumbar punctures, intrathecal, IV, and oral chemotherapy, and blood transfusions. He is now in the phase of his treatment where he has a high dose of methotrexate every 15 days that requires him to be hospitalized for 3-5 days.

