

DISCOVER THE DIFFERENCE

Fall/Winter 2008

Banner Desert Medical Center

Pay It Forward

CLOSE CALL PROMPTS
GENEROUS GIFT

A Survivor's Story

FIGHTING OVARIAN CANCER
AT 27

Miracle Baby

*Safe arrival
despite Mom's cancer*



Paying it Forward

After lifesaving brain surgery for their daughter, parents raise money for an in-hospital school

By ELISE RILEY | Photos By LAURA SEGALL



Now 13, Shannon Smith remembers little of her brain surgery and hospital stay four years ago at Banner Children's Hospital at Banner Desert Medical Center. Today she enjoys swimming and baking cookies with her mother, Betsy, and dad, Kevin.

Over the years, Kevin and Betsy Smith had seen every type of sniffle, fever and headache with their daughter Shannon. But something just didn't seem right with the flu she was fighting in 2004. Their pediatrician, Elizabeth McKenna, MD, told the Smiths to go to Banner Children's if Shannon's condition worsened. "They have an excellent emergency room," Dr. McKenna said. "And when you have a complex situation, you want a pediatric emergency physician."

The Smiths couldn't keep Shannon's fever under control. She was dehydrated. An odd, tiny bump, smaller than a pimple, had formed on her temple. And then she started hallucinating.

"She was sitting on the couch and she started giggling," Kevin said. "We asked her what was so funny and she said, 'You didn't see that? Mommy was just upside down.'"

The Smiths took their pediatrician's advice and took Shannon to the hospital, thinking she needed IV fluids and antibiotics. But the doctors who first examined Shannon thought her condition warranted more investigation, and ordered X-rays and a CT scan.

"They came out and said that a neurosurgeon was on the way to talk to us," Betsy said.

What they thought was a bad case of the flu became something much worse — they soon discovered Shannon needed lifesaving brain surgery.

Bacteria and four different virus strains had moved from Shannon's sinuses to her brain, forming an abscess. The resulting infection caused increased pressure, and her body simulated flu-like symptoms including a severe headache. Cases like hers, in which a cold developed rapidly into the abscess, are nearly impossible to detect.

"If we had gone home, she would've died," Kevin said.

The team of pediatric specialists drilled holes in Shannon's skull to relieve swelling. An incision ran across the top of her head from ear to ear.

Two weeks later, doctors discovered a subdural abscess and operated again. After a 7-day induced coma, she spent a month in the pediatric intensive care unit.

"A lot of good came from a horrible situation. These people were our family, and we were theirs. In our minds, Shannon is leaving a legacy."

— Kevin Smith,
Shannon's
father

Healing Patient and Family

The surgeries took both a physical and emotional toll on Shannon. Staples from the surgeries lined the top of her head. A large bandage covering the incision was anything but pretty.

So her nurses decided it was time for a makeover.

They transformed the bandage into a headband and covered it with stickers.

They polished her fingernails and toenails. The technician who conducted her CT scan in the emergency room brought Shannon a pair of fuzzy pink slippers.

Therapy dogs entertained the girl, and the nurses showed her how to turn a syringe into a water gun. Not long before her four-month hospital stay ended, the nurses ambushed Shannon with an epic Silly String fight.

Now, four years later, the Smiths remain dedicated to Banner Children's Hospital at Banner Desert Medical Center, finding a permanent way to give thanks and help other children.

Today, Shannon is a lanky, healthy 13-year-old. Her recollections of her time in the hospital are surprising.

"It was fun," she said. "We had Silly String fights and syringe fights. I was a little scared, but I knew it would be OK."

Giving Back

Shannon's parents, not surprisingly, remember quite a bit more. A teacher, Betsy realized the burden that children in the hospital faced when they were unable to maintain their schoolwork. From that realization came an inspiration — an in-hospital school with a dedicated teacher.

Kevin, who works at State Farm Insurance, enlisted



Teacher Sue Schiff reviews a lesson with Amanda McQuillen, 6, of Mesa.

the help of his colleagues and gained substantial support from the company. Through their efforts, \$150,000 has been raised and, today, the school has two full-time teachers and supplies.

"We just fell in love with Shannon," said Maureen Cahill, a senior clinical manager for pediatric hematology and oncology and one of the nurses who cared for Shannon. "Her mom and dad focused on giving back the moment she left."

Cahill estimates that two-thirds of the hospital's patients interact with an on-site teacher at some point during their stay.

"A lot of good came from a horrible situation," Kevin said. "These people were our family, and we were theirs. In our minds, Shannon is leaving a legacy." 🐾

How Can I Give Back?

Through the Eyes of a Child

With its *Through the Eyes of a Child* Capital Campaign, Banner Health Foundation is committed to securing \$15 million in charitable contributions to support the expansion of Banner Children's Hospital at Banner Desert Medical Center.

Funds from the *Through the Eyes of a Child* Capital Campaign will create a unique healing environment featuring state-of-the-art facilities, combined with medical excellence, to meet the health care needs of children in our community.

To learn more about supporting the *Through the Eyes of a Child* Capital Campaign or other giving opportunities, please contact 480-512-4453.