

Heidi Budd on the road to recovery after brain surgery

Written by Darci Tomky

- It's a miracle. That's how Angela (Conde) Purdy described her daughter's recovery after a functional hemispherectomy less than two months ago.

- Heidi Budd has undergone more surgeries and procedures than your average 14-year-old girl after a car accident in 1999, but hopefully she is now on the road to recovery.

- For the past year, Heidi was experiencing increased seizures, with as many as 11 in one day.

- She did some testing at Children's Hospital in Aurora in November and then took CT scans in February to try to pinpoint which side of the brain the seizures were coming from.

- While spending nine days in the hospital in April, Heidi used an EMU (Epilepsy Monitoring Unit) that was hooked up to an EEG machine—something that can detect abnormal patterns in the brain that might be causing seizures. The doctors used this test to rate the severity of the seizures including how long they were lasting and how frequently they occurred.

- Neurosurgeons, rehab doctors and Purdy all met and came to one conclusion—Heidi was the perfect candidate for a functional hemispherectomy.

- This radical procedure is a variation of a hemispherectomy in which one entire hemisphere, or one half of the brain, is removed. In Heidi's case, her functional hemispherectomy would disconnect the left hemisphere of her brain from the rest of the brain, and a limited area of brain tissue would be removed.

- Doctors explained this as preservation surgery—they wanted to protect the parts of her brain that were functioning properly. They predicted that without the surgery Heidi would be completely brain dead within five years because the seizures on the left side were so severe they were also hurting the right hemisphere of the brain.

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□ On May 26, Heidi went through a seven-hour surgery at Children's Hospital. Purdy explained doctors removed a quarter of Heidi's brain on the left side. Only 10 percent of the left hemisphere was functioning, and the rest was dead anyway, she said.

□ The next few weeks were not an easy road for Heidi. After the procedure, Heidi regressed into baby talk (or not talking at all) in addition to regressing in her toileting, eating and walking. She had to learn everything again, said Purdy.

□ Heidi started therapy soon after her surgery. She has done really well with speech therapy and is doing much better with feeding herself and other daily tasks. One thing that has given her trouble is walking, specifically gaining strength in her right leg. She will spend 2-4 months doing physical therapy 2-10 hours a week.

□ While dealing with all of these setbacks, there was an even more important issue at hand. Three days after surgery Heidi experienced a seizure from the right side of her brain.

□ She had 12 seizures in nine days with up to three in a single day. The good news was that these seemed to be a different type of seizure from the ones Heidi experienced before the procedure.

□ Purdy was thrilled to say medication got the seizures under control, and Heidi hasn't had one since.

□ "We all consider her surgery a huge success!" beamed Purdy.

□ Since returning home June 24, Heidi has been to a picnic, walked around a park and went to a day camp where she had a blast. She and her family went to the lake where Heidi was very excited to go in the water. She has even been to Holyoke (where grandparents Monse and Olga Conde live) to see the fireworks on July 4.

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□ “Oh the joys of seeing her now!” said Purdy.

□ Her faith in God is one thing that helped her get through this to see her daughter doing so well now. “It was God’s blessing that everything happened the way it did. He definitely had a hand in it,” she said. Purdy added how grateful she is for the doctors, but said that God certainly played a part in guiding the doctors’ hands through surgery.

□ “The outpouring of love and support was amazing,” said Purdy. Between getting time off work and all the prayers for Heidi, friends and family have been faithful during this long, hard journey.

□ On top of everything going on at the hospital, Purdy and her family were able to move into their new Habitat for Humanity house in Berthoud just one day before Heidi was discharged from the hospital on June 24.

□ It is a barrier-free home so Heidi can maneuver through wide hallways and be comfortable in the open floor plan. Special elements made just for the 14-year-old were a wheelchair lift, a unique bathtub that will massage but won’t cause seizures and a wrap-around sidewalk from the front to the back of the house.

□ Purdy expressed her thanks for all those from the Holyoke community who contributed to their new house. She invites everyone to the home’s dedication and open house event Sunday, July 18 from 2-4 p.m. in Berthoud. For directions to the house, email Purdy at gelpur@hotmail.com.