

Get the whole story

Missed part one of Sarah's Second Chance? You can still read it. "On the waiting list," the first part of Sarah Gravel's story is online at www.monroenews.com, under Your Health. If you would like a copy of the printed version, give the Monroe Evening News a call at 242-1100 or stop by our customer service desk at 20 W. First St. The July 5 issue, including part one of Sarah's Second Chance in Your Health, can be purchased for 50 cents.



Sunglasses should absorb UV light

Dark lenses aren't necessarily the best protection for your eyes from the sun. When choosing sunglasses, look for lenses that absorb 99 to 100 percent of UV light, especially UV-B. The tint doesn't mean as much as the protective lens, according to Lighthouse International, a vision advocacy group. Without the use of protective lenses outdoors, it could take up to 30 minutes to adjust to indoor light. The lack of lenses also could damage your eyes.

Your Health

A guide to better living through fitness, medicine, diet and wellness

section **C**
THE MONROE
EVENING NEWS
TUESDAY
JULY 12, 2005

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The Monroe Evening News

HEALTH
CALENDAR

Volunteers to aid with Medicare

The Area Agency on Aging 1-B, in conjunction with area groups, senior centers and senior residences, is training volunteers to assist seniors and other Medicare-eligible people in choosing the correct plan this fall, when Medicare will offer new prescription plans to replace the temporary prescription card offered since early 2004.

Once the initial volunteer training is completed, volunteers are asked to provide at least 10 prescription assistance referrals a month, attend periodic update trainings and complete monthly reports for the AAA-1B.

Training will be held from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. July 20 at the Monroe Senior Center, 15275 S. Dixie Hwy. Lunch will be provided.

For more information, call Carrie Shea at (800) 803-7174.

Hearing, vision tests offered

The Monroe County Health Department will offer free hearing and vision screening for children ages 3 to 5 in the Monroe Public Schools district who have not been screened previously for hearing and vision problems since turning 3.

Screenings will be held from 9 to 11:30 a.m. and from 1 to 3 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and July 19-22 at Cantrick Middle School, 1008 Riverview Ave. An appointment is required.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, call 240-7855.

Tecumseh run funds scholarship

TECUMSEH — The 11th annual Kelly Carter Scholarship run is slated for July 30, with all proceeds benefiting the Kelly Carter Scholarship.

Participation costs \$15 if mailed before July 22 and \$20 for race-day sign-up. The 1-mile fun walk costs \$10. All fees include a run T-shirt. Applications are available at 109 Herrick Park Dr. and 1525 W. Maumee St., Suite 3, Adrian.

The race begins at 8 a.m. at the Carter Rehab Center. For more information, contact Angie at (517) 423-7722 or e-mail angie_birdsall@yahoo.com.

Needs fair seeks firms, helpers

TOLEDO — The Community Needs Fair, held in December at Shriners Hall in Toledo, is seeking businesses and volunteers to help with the event.

The fair will be used to distribute information to those with physical or mental difficulties. Social organizations, services, businesses, groups, churches or individuals interested in displaying services or volunteering time at the benefit dance for those with autism, can call (419) 862-0098.

To submit an item for the next health calendar, send items to stacyk@monroenews.com or via fax at 242-0937.

SARAH'S SECOND CHANCE



Michelle and her mother, Maureen, help Sarah read from one of several hospital-provided books that help young patients understand the need for, and experience of, receiving an organ transplant. It was one of the many activities that the family engaged in as they passed the numerous hours in their hospital room prior to Sarah's surgery.

The night before

Her parents worry, wonder and wait as Sarah spends her last night with her diseased liver

STORY BY STACY KESS ■ PHOTOS BY KIM BRENT

ANN ARBOR — After only 8½ hours on the transplant list, Sarah Gravel was settling into a hospital room at the end of the hallway at University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 5-West.

The 6-year-old neonatal hepatitis patient officially had been placed on the liver transplant list at 12:36 p.m. May 13. Doctors located a potential liver about two hours later. At 7:30 p.m., as Sarah, her brother, Jacob, 8, and her sister, Anna, 2, were finishing their nightly chore of picking up the living room and choosing bedtime stories, their mother, Michelle Gravel, received the call: a potential liver had been found.

The family flew into action and said a quick prayer for the family of the person who had died, possibly saving Sarah's life in the process. Jacob and Anna were sent off with Baba, their grandmother, Maureen Palmer, to their grandfather's house, while Mrs. Gravel and her husband, Ron, began the trek to UM Mott Hospital, the state's only pediatric liver transplant facility, where a second chance at life awaited for their daughter.

An Evening News reporter and photographer documented the experience.

9:15 p.m. May 13, Mott Children's Hospital, fifth floor west, Room 514

Sarah explored the new surroundings of her room — a small cube of hospital-white walls, punctuated with a large framed picture of Donald Duck, computers, equipment and a small alcove off to one side leading to a bathroom — while Michelle filled out a thick packet of registration and consent forms.

"Now I'm shaking," Michelle said, following each line of the form with the pen. For only a moment, the shaking stopped — enough time for her to tease her daughter: "Sarah, do you smoke or drink?"

Sarah giggled and shook her head no. "Any problems peein' or poopin'?" Michelle asked.

"Who?" Ron said, looking up with a grin from his spot wedged between a duffel bag and pillow on the vinyl bench along the wall. "Oh, you mean Sarah."

Sarah, shy around most people, displayed the giddiness and energy of a child headed



"I'm the doctor," Sarah playfully explains, as she dons a stethoscope and, with mom Michelle's guidance, tries to listen to her heartbeat.

SARAH'S SECOND CHANCE

July 5 — Part 1: On the waiting list

Today — Part 2: The night before

July 19 — Part 3: A new liver, a new lease

July 26 — Part 4: A new life at home



Sarah hides behind "Duckina" and burrows into her mothers lap as Dr. M. James Lopez explains the procedures involved with Sarah's surgery to the waiting family.

See SARAH, Page 2C

FROM PAGE 1C

DONATING LIFE: HOW IT WORKS

When a patient designates his organs and tissue for donation after death in Michigan, Gift of Life, the Michigan nonprofit donation group that acts as an intermediate between donor and recipient is called into help.

When a potential organ donor is admitted to the hospital, every attempt is made to save the patient's life, compliant with the patient's wishes and the family's wishes.

■ When death occurs, Gift of Life is notified. Gift of Life checks the patient's name against the registry to determine if the patient had intended for his organs and tissues to be donated. If the name is not on the list, the family is offered the opportunity to make such a donation. If the family agrees, they provide written consent to organ and tissue donation.

■ When organ donation is approved with the family (and, in some instances, the coroner or medical examiner), the donor's body is maintained with a ventilator and drugs while tests are performed for each organ's viability. While tests are completed, potential recipients are identified through the United Network for Organ Sharing. Donors in Michigan will first be matched to Michigan recipients. If no Michigan recipient are identified, the organ will then be matched to Indiana and Ohio residents.

■ An organ recovery team, a special surgical team that removes the organs from the donor and prepares them for donation, begins removing the usable organs from the donor. Organs are cooled and prepared in a special solution to preserve them until transplant. Once all organs are removed, the tissues are removed and prepared for transplant. The heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, intestines and pancreas can be harvested for organ donation and the cornea or eyes, skin, bones, heart valves, veins and tendons can be harvested for tissue donation.

■ Once the process is completed, the donor is released to the family for funeral arrangements. During the donation process, all attempts are made to maintain the body's appearance so the family can plan an open-casket funeral if desired.

Because donating an organ postmortem can be an emotional experience of loss for the family, Gift of Life and the United Network for Organ Sharing attempt to maintain the anonymity of the donor for at least a year after the donation process. At the end of the year, the opportunity is given to the donor and recipient family to make contact.

Although organ and tissue donation may be marked on the back of a Michigan driver's license, driver's licenses are not available or consulted for many hospital deaths. As the Michigan organ and tissue donation network, Gift of Life is notified when any Michigan hospital death occurs. Gift of Life urges all Michiganders to sign up on the Gift of Life registry at www.giftoflifemichigan.org to avoid any confusion or delays if they wish to donate their organs and tissues at death, and to discuss their donation wishes with their families.



A couple of hours into the family's hours-long wait before Sarah's transplant surgery, Ron feels his anxiety getting the better of him and steps out of the room to collect his thoughts and feelings as Sarah and Michelle continue reading in her room at Mott Children's Hospital.



Michelle Gravel tries to steady Sarah as Nurse Hannah Bufford inserts her first IV before surgery.



Shortly after her IV has been inserted and secured, Sarah is back to her coloring books and crayons, drawing and playing well into the early morning hours before her surgery.

“You keep holding still and saying ‘ow.’”

—Michelle Gravel, Sarah's mother

Sarah (cont.)

to the amusement park as she played with the pedal-operated hand sink across from her new bed and dug through the salmon pink bucket of amenities — a pair of yellow slipper-socks at least two sizes too big for her, a stethoscope and several wash cloths — on the table.

Her excitement turned to fireworks when Baba appeared in the door caring a plush, stuffed duck, affectionately called “Duckina” after Jacob's similar stuffed animal, “Ducky.”

“Happy new liver,” Baba embraced her granddaughter.

“Happy new liver,” Sarah parroted.

10:01 p.m., Room 514

Ron watched Sarah, her golden skin, yellow eyes and ballooned abdomen carried by a tiny body stunted by illness.

His eyes welled up from panic. He pushed himself off the bench and slipped out into the hallway, standing just out of sight from the hallway window into Sarah's room.

“I just had...” he trailed off, his eyes shifting from the floor to the ceiling. “I can't let her see me like this.”

He drew in a long, slow

breath, then swallowed hard.

“I've just stuffed, I've stuffed everything inside and it's just...” He motioned forward.

Over his right shoulder, the hallway window framed Sarah in her hospital room, flipping through “Lizzy Gets a New Liver,” a children's book describing liver transplants.

The hospital room was a somewhat familiar setting for Sarah, who was at Mott only a few months earlier because of a high fever. It wasn't long after that the family first met with the

transplant team.

“You know what's amazing?” Baba asked, ready with an answer. “To think we won't have to do hospital stays after (the transplant).”

Baba, Michelle and Ron — who, now composed, again sat wedged between bags and pillows — exchanged exhausted glances.

Sarah looked at her dad, her head tipped to one side.

“Go to sleep,” she instructed nonchalantly. “You look tired.”

“Thanks, boss,” he said, cracking a smile.

11:15 p.m., Room 514

Dr. M. James Lopez greeted the Gravels with a toothy smile.

“Dr. Magee tells me you want a liver transplant tonight,” he said.

Sarah rolled her eyes, pulled the stethoscope from the bucket on the table, wrapped it around her neck and stood up on the bed.

“I'm the doctor,” she said.

Despite her efforts, Dr. Lopez continued with his intended purpose: “Once

she's asleep, she'll get an arterial line. It's a special line that goes into the wrists,” he said. “We use every monitor possible to see how her physiology's doing at all times.”

The transplant would take anywhere from six to 12 hours — that is, assuming the liver was usable. Dr. Magee and his team had not yet seen the liver and would not see it until it arrived, when would decide if the liver was healthy enough for transplant. The procedure itself was not risk-free, carrying with it the possibility of bleeding, blood clots, complications from anesthesia and malfunction of other organs. Infection is possible, as is rejection of the new organ.

Sarah's vigor faded as Dr. Lopez described the process, and the severe shyness that plagues her around most people returned. She clutched Duckina and curled into a ball, burying her head in her mother's lap. She pulled a plaid pastel blanket over her small body, remaining silent until Dr. Lopez bid the family good night.

“I want to get a movie,” Sarah whimpered.

“She's tired,” Ron said, pulling out an energy drink.

“You know, at some point, I'm going to have to catch some sleep,” Michelle said.

“Maybe next Tuesday,” Ron quipped.

“I guess the enormity of it hit me when (Dr. Lopez) started talking about the lines,” Michelle said.

Ron nodded in agreement.

“My anxiety level went up times 10,” he said. “You run into a brick wall.”

1:14 a.m., Room 514

“You don't have to like it, but you have to get it.” Michelle coaxed her daughter to calm down.

Nurse Hannah Bufford held a tray of plastic needles and tubes, all for Sarah's IV line.

“Mama will be right here with you,” Michelle said.

“One, two, three,” the nurse counted, puncturing the skin on Sarah's right hand.

She screamed in pain.

When the nearly two-minute process ended, Sarah again buried her head in her mother's lap, holding out her limp hand like an injured paw. The needle had to be redone.

Michelle rubbed her back. “It's okay.”

“I don't want another one,” Sarah shrieked.

“You keep holding still and

See **SARAH**, Page 3C

BY THE NUMBERS

386

The number of Michiganders listed on the transplant waiting list in need of a liver, as of July 1.

12

Age, in days, of the youngest liver recipient was at the time of transplant.

20

Percentage of liver transplants at University of Michigan Hospital performed on children.

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FROM PAGE 2C

Sarah (cont.)

saying 'ow,' " Michelle said.

Sarah quieted and looked with curiosity at her right hand, capped with tubes.

Michelle and Ron looked at each other; both clearly exhausted from the sight of Sarah crying from needles, her face twisted with pain.

Baba, quiet in the corner for most of the procedure, broke the silence that settled in after the nurse left. She told the family of 99 jars she had spent the day finishing by pasting on printed explanations of Sarah's condition. The jars would be scattered around southeast Michigan to help defray the costs of Sarah's surgery and perhaps help the family purchase a reliable vehicle to transport Sarah to and from her appointments in Ann Arbor. Now the jars were in need of an edit.

"We'll have to add 'Sarah had her transplant,'" she said.

"It's been a long time since we've had to pull an all-nighter at the hospital," Michelle said.

"Somehow, I don't miss it," Ron said.

Michelle handed Sarah two stickers, one earned for each IV.

"Am I going to have this when I have surgery, Mama?" Sarah asked.

"Yes," Michelle answered. She opened "Lizzy Gets a New Liver" and began to read aloud, a comfort for the adults in the room as well as Sarah.

2:46 a.m., Room 514

"I look silly," Sarah whined, looking at the "before" image of herself on the screen of her mom's digital camera.

"You look cute," Michelle said.

Sarah's silliness turned to thoughts of food. She hadn't eaten since dinner and would not have anything else to eat before surgery. Dreaming of bacon pizza, she grabbed a tissue and bit.

"This isn't food," she said with a giggle, shoving the rest in her mouth. "I can eat it."

"That's why I have problems with my back," Ron said, sighing dramatically. "I'm wrapped around her finger."

Michelle, stretched out on Sarah's bed, looked up, tired.

"Do you have an off switch?" she teased her daughter. "I'm going to ask them to install an off switch."

"Ask them to take her batteries out," Ron added.

"I don't have batteries," Sarah yelled.

Baba, awake but tired, nods to the bag of saline attached to Sarah through the IV. "Are you sure this is normal saline?"

3:36 a.m., Room 514

Baba sat in a rocking chair in the corner, Sarah nestled in her arms like a baby.

On the other side of the room, Michelle and Ron spoke to each other quietly.

"I opened up the thread on the (Web) forum," Ron said. "Capital letters: Sarah is going to the hospital now for her transplant."

"I'm just sort of numb," Michelle said. "I'm waiting."

"I want it to be 24 hours from now," Ron said. "Brain's going a million miles a second ... Actually, I'm very concerned and a bit worried. I had the worst vision, and I just had to stuff it."

"It's okay for you to be terrified," Michelle told him.

"I'm past that," he said.

3:58 a.m., University of Michigan Hospital Emergency Room

The donated liver intended for Sarah arrived at Mott Hospital.

5:18 a.m., Room 514

"Sleeping beauty," Michelle whispered, gazing at a finally napping Sarah.

"She's a silly kid," Ron said.

Michelle studied her husband's face. "You look miserable."

"Tired," he answered. "It set in a while ago. I'm just too tired."

"It hasn't really set in yet," Michelle said. "I keep expect-



In the wee hours of the morning, shortly before Sarah is to be taken down to the OR, she finally falls asleep, as does her father Ron. Michelle, despite having vowed to get some sleep that night, lies awake next to her daughter.

“You’re going to go in and get your new liver. I love you.”

— Michelle, Sarah’s mom



Just before Sarah is wheeled through the double doors of the operating suite, the family, including her father, Ron, is allowed to give her a final kiss and hug goodbye. They would head to a different floor to wait the several hours until her surgery was complete.



Her family having kissed and hugged her, Sarah is wheeled down to the OR by members of the anesthesiology team, including Dr. Wilson Chimbra, the attending anesthesiologist for the procedure.

ing them to call it off."

"We've been in the hospital so many times. This doesn't feel any different," Baba said.

5:42 a.m., Room 514

Dr. Magee stood by the door, not yet dressed for surgery. It was the last time he would see the Gravels until after Sarah's surgery.

"She's still obviously sick. She's just sick enough to benefit from this," he said. "The operation may take six to 10 hours, maybe shorter."

Michelle and Ron nodded, taking it in.

"Any questions? If I had answers, I'd be useful," Dr. Magee joked.

"I'm glad, and I'm sad at the same time that it's a whole liver," Michelle said. "I'm glad for Sarah and sad for that (donor)."

"Thank you, God, for the liver and thank you, God, for the family that made that

decision," Baba added.

Nurses scurried around Sarah, readying her for transfer to the operating room. The motion of the gurney woke her to unrecognized surroundings; she whimpered softly, then began to cry.

"It's okay, Mama's got you," Michelle cooed, walking along side the gurney. "Dr. Magee came in. He's the one who's going to do your surgery, and he says your liver looks perfect."

The gurney moved down the hall, leading a solemn procession. Ron followed with bags and Baba with blankets to take with them to the waiting room.

"It's okay to be upset," Michelle continued. "You're going to go in and get your new liver. I love you."

The family squeezed into the elevator alongside Sarah's gurney and anesthesiologist for the trip down two floors. The elevator doors opened in front of the mas-

sive doors leading to the sterile operating rooms, one of which was for Sarah.

"You're going to do just fine," Ron said, kissing her forehead.

"I love you angel baby," Baba said as Sarah faded from the first anesthesia.

Asleep from the anesthesia, Sarah was wheeled through the heavy doors, down the hall and into the bright operating room.

6 a.m., Mott Children's Hospital, third floor, Pediatric Operating Room 4 ...

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