

Jacob Acurio

9 months old

May 2003

PATIENT OF THE MONTH

Diagnosis:

Jacob was found to have neuroblastoma in November 2002.

Jacob's Story:

It was a sinking feeling, Jacob's mom remembered. She was sure her heart had stopped beating.

"We think there is a mass," the doctor had said. "And we want to follow up on that."

The doctor had just found cancer in her 3-month-old son. She thought to herself, "This is not happening. This is absolutely not happening. He just got here. How can he be sick?"

Additional testing showed that the tumor, called neuroblastoma, had formed inside Jacob's spinal canal. Mom remembered being in the room with the doctors when the images from Jacob's CT scan came in. "There's that quiet hush across the room when you know that something is wrong because no one is saying anything."

Their doctor suggested that Jacob come to St. Jude for treatment. Stunned, and not knowing what else to do, the family heeded their doctor's advice and brought Jacob to Memphis.

At St. Jude:

Still dazed, Jacob's mom handed her credit card to the registrar at St. Jude. "Put whatever you need on it. Just set it up for me," she told her. But the St. Jude clerk pushed the card away. "Oh no. We have that taken care of," she said. When Mom asked what she meant, the registrar told her how St. Jude covers all costs for medical care not covered by insurance, regardless of a family's ability to pay.

"I was speechless," she said. But the good news was soon overshadowed by her son's condition.

The tumor was compressing Jacob's spine, almost pushing it all the way over to one side. "I can't imagine the pain he was going through," she said. Surgery was immediately performed to relieve the enormous pressure on Jacob's spine. Days later, Jacob began his chemotherapy to shrink what remained of the tumor. "I can't describe to anyone how overwhelming it was," Mom said.

Doctors are currently monitoring a spot the size of a large jelly bean located outside Jacob's spinal column. If the spot is larger by Jacob's next MRI, a second operation may be considered.

