

Soren Jacobsen

It was a phone call that changed the Jacobsens' lives forever. The family was returning to their Fresno home from Children's Hospital when they received the call asking them to turn around and come back. They soon learned that their young son, Soren, needed to be admitted to the Hospital's inpatient cancer unit immediately.

"It was devastating, all of these emotions wrapped up, anger and pain," said Soren's father, Tim, about hearing the news.

The family's pediatrician had referred Soren to Children's for testing. Soren showed cold-like symptoms that had lingered for a couple of weeks.

"He looked bad, he was pale and had a really high fever," said Tim. "I noticed he had bruises but thought it had happened at daycare."

Pediatric oncologists at the Hospital's Craycroft Cancer Center diagnosed Soren with acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL) 10 days after his third birthday. The most common type of childhood cancer, ALL accounts for one quarter to one third of all cancers in children. The disease affects white blood cells, causing them to overproduce malignant and immature cells while crowding out other blood cells in the bone marrow. The cancer spreads to the bloodstream and other vital organs quickly, and is life-threatening if not treated.

"Once a child is diagnosed, we start treatment immediately," said Dr. J. Daniel Ozeran, a Children's oncologist. "There are no other childhood cancer doctors in the Central Valley. We're really the only pediatric oncology doctors in the area."

One of the largest pediatric cancer centers on the West Coast, the Craycroft Cancer Center at Children's is a member of Children's Oncology Group (COG), a national cooperative research collaborative of more than 2,000 physicians in the United States and Canada. As a COG member, Children's has access to the information the group generates, providing patients and families the latest medications and most effective treatment regimens.

"The benefit is getting the best therapy there is," said Dr. Ozeran. "We can rapidly improve upon treatment in a short period of time. Here at Children's, we diagnose and treat over 100 new patients each year, with about 300 patients on COG protocols at any one time."

COG members have been the primary innovators in new treatments for children with cancer. "Through cooperative treatment studies, COG members like Children's Hospital have improved long-term survival for ALL patients from less than 50 percent to more than 85-90 percent," said Dr. Ozeran.

Soren was placed on a three-and-a-half-year COG treatment plan. Now 5 years old, he has completed his second year of therapy. Although his cancer is in remission, he continues to take medications at home daily. He also sees the oncology team monthly to monitor his status and administer chemotherapy and draw blood through his port, an IV access device implanted under the skin.

Inspired by the team of oncologists that cared for him, Soren said when he grows up he wants “to be a doctor for kids and help with the blood and IVs.”

Today, Soren is ten years old and healthy. An enthusiastic champion for the Hospital, he often recommends Children’s to friends and family. “Whenever anybody gets sick, he tells them, ‘You should go to my hospital,’” said Tricia, Soren’s mom.

Craycroft Cancer Center patients get treated like family, and the Jacobsens appreciate knowing Soren’s caregivers so well. “They take the time to get to know the patients, like they’re their own child,” said Tricia. “We feel blessed because Soren’s thriving and in good hands.”