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Patient with rare disease finds cure after infusions at Peoples Cancer Institute

DALTON, Ga. (November 19, 2024) – For Patti Martin, life has been a relentless battle — one she’s been fighting since childhood.

The Chatsworth resident, former nurse, and infusion patient at Peoples Cancer Institute (PCI), had been diagnosed with hypomagnesemia and spent seven years undergoing magnesium infusions. Hypomagnesemia is a rare condition which left her body dangerously deficient in magnesium, which is essential for basic bodily functions like maintaining a steady heartbeat and breathing.

“I really should be dead,” Martin said, reflecting on the years she fought for her life against an illness that doctors struggled to diagnose. “I survived what I thought would take me out. God’s plan is greater than what my vision can comprehend.”

Though most patients at PCI are treated for cancer, Martin attended the clinic twice a week for years to receive life-sustaining infusions. Then, scientists at a research hospital diagnosed the root cause of her worsening health issues, and Martin found hope.

Her condition, hypomagnesemia, was triggered by a combination of genetics, her body’s violent reaction to vitamin C acetate, and long-term use of a type of heartburn medications. Over time, it caused severe inflammation, eroded her body’s tissues, and depleted her magnesium reserves. For years, she unknowingly worsened her symptoms by taking oral vitamin C, a discovery made after her participation in an undiagnosed disease program in Tennessee.

Martin’s health struggles stretched far beyond magnesium deficiency. During her battle with the disease, she endured the loss of her husband, Philip, and she also experienced a stroke, brain surgery, dangerously low iron, congestive heart failure, and osteoporosis leading to multiple broken bones.

“At one point, doctors told me I should be dead based on my magnesium levels,” she said. Her magnesium levels had dropped so low that she suffered from neuropathy and vision loss. Nurses brought her ice packs during infusions to cope with the burning sensation in her nerves.

The doctor in the undiagnosed disease program with whom she worked understood the underlying cause and devised a high-dose, rapid infusion plan to treat it in a way that helped alter the problem at the DNA level. Armed with that knowledge, she was finally able to end the weekly infusions that had been a lifeline — and a challenge — for so many years. In September 2023, she celebrated her last infusion at PCI.

But her time at PCI left a lasting impression.

“These people are like family to me,” Martin said of the PCI staff, who supported her through countless infusions, some lasting up to 10 hours.

Despite her health challenges, Martin never gave up. In her darkest moments, she leaned on her faith, her family and the support of an online community she built through social media. Her transparency in documenting her health journey turned internet friends into real-life allies.

“I fought so hard to live while so much of me died,” she said. “What I thought would kill me, I have survived, and I’m here to tell the tale.”

At 55 years old, Martin reflects on the resilience that kept her alive through unimaginable trials. “Not today, Satan, and you ain’t good for tomorrow either, buddy,” she said. “I defied the odds. I made doctors question why the heck I’m still here.”

Now, after a decade-long battle, Martin says she is living proof that even in the darkest of times, hope, faith, perseverance — and the right support — can make all the difference.

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Photo: Patti Martin