

Toddler Finally Diagnosed On Third ER Visit

A.J. Mathis was four months old in September of 1994 when he was taken by his parents to the ER Department at Martin Memorial Medical Center on three consecutive days. On September 19, they reported that he had not had a bowel movement in three days, he had vomited and appeared to be having significant abdominal pain. A diagnosis of constipation was made by the ER physician and he was sent home.

On September 20, his parents felt he was worse and took him to the ER again. He had been vomiting consistently over the prior 24 hours. A diagnosis of a stomach infection (gastroenteritis) was made and he was again sent home.

On September 21, the family took A.J. back to the ER for a third time. He was noted to have diarrhea tinged with blood, ***Continued on Page Three.***

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would not eat and was very lethargic. Twelve hours after arriving at the ER, x-rays were done which showed a potential obstruction in A.J.'s bowels. It was then decided that he needed a pediatric surgical consult, which would have to be done at St. Mary's Medical Center in West Palm Beach since no such physician is on staff at Martin Memorial Medical Center. Four hours after that decision was made, A.J. was finally transferred to St. Mary's.

A.J. was diagnosed with a bowel obstruction called intussusception. With this problem, a portion of small intestine folds back over itself which causes blood flow to dramatically decrease or cease, causing the death of the surrounding tissue. Immediate surgery was performed on A.J. A subsequent surgery was also necessary, resulting in the loss of two thirds of A.J.'s small intestine.

As a result of this bowel loss, A.J. was unable to properly assimilate food orally and had to be fed by means of a tube affixed to his stomach. He has gradually improved to the point where the majority of his food can be eaten normally and only small nutritional supplements need to be tube fed.

As a result of his initial surgeries and bowel loss, A.J. experienced many infections and illnesses, requiring additional hospitalizations. As he has grown older, those have become much less frequent.

For the rest of his life, A.J. will have "short bowel syndrome." He will need vitamin supplements and will have multiple daily soft stools. Despite his disability, A.J. is a happy, well-adjusted four year old who will begin his pre-K schooling this fall.

Chris Speed negotiated a settlement of \$2,050,000 with insurance adjusters representing the hospital and the three emergency room physicians. A significant portion of A.J.'s net proceeds will purchase an annuity which will disburse a lifetime stream of income for him. ■