

Family and Healing Par for the Course at BMC: Fritz's Story

“You’ll be in the best hands at Boston Medical Center.” On the brink of facing one of the most difficult journeys of his life, Fritz Gorst was unsure what these words would eventually mean.

Fritz—an avid golfer and lover of the outdoors—was experiencing unusual leg swelling, originally thought to be caused by age and long days on his feet. After unsuccessful attempts at reducing the swelling, his physician identified increased levels of protein in his urine and about 30 pounds of fluid in each leg. A kidney biopsy revealed his diagnosis: Amyloid Light-chain (AL) amyloidosis. A group of diseases arising from misfolded proteins which accumulate as amyloid deposits, AL amyloidosis is the most common form of amyloidosis. For Fritz, the disease—and word—seemed foreign.

“To be able to have two sticks in my hand and glide across the ice—I had tears in my eyes. I thought to myself, ‘this is absolutely amazing.’” FRITZ GORST

A vigilant researcher, Fritz looked up amyloidosis online. “According to the internet, I would be gone in six months,” he remembers. Weeding through information, Fritz located a support group and called its founder. She recommended BMC’s Amyloidosis Center—the exact place where his diagnosing physician was sending his records. “She said amyloidosis was only treated in a few centers in the country and BMC was one of the best.” World-renowned for its significant contributions to laboratory and clinical research and excellence in patient care and diagnostic tests, providers at the center decided he was an excellent candidate for high-dose chemotherapy and autologous stem cell transplantation.

Fritz found the best treatment at BMC, but that would not be all: he also found an extended family there. With treatments requiring a lot of time spent at the hospital, he developed a bond with his providers. “Everyone was by my side, caring for me,” recalls Fritz, who remembers each and every provider’s name—one of which was his nurse, Sue Spinney, R.N., B.S.N. As much of an impact his caretakers had on him, he did the same, sharing joyful stories in light of challenging treatments. “He always brought pictures of his grandson with him,” Spinney notes.

Unexpectedly, Fritz’s health took a turn for the worse and he went into cardiac arrest. “I crashed and burned,” he says. “The ER docs brought me back.” After successful resuscitation, it was soon discovered Fritz lost blood flow to his feet. Ultimately needing to have both legs amputated, Fritz feared it would keep him from being active. His surgeon, Jeffrey Kalish, M.D., director of endovascular surgery, ensured it would not hold him back. “I haven’t had one skin breakdown,” remarks Fritz about the success of his surgery, which



Fritz was among fellow BMC patients who walked the runway at the 2015 Catwalk for BMC Cancer Care, which raises key funds for cancer patient support services.

has contributed to his rehabilitation. “If I were to take my legs off, you would think I was born this way.”

Within a year, Fritz was back on the ice, playing sled hockey. “To be able to have two sticks in my hand and glide across the ice—I had tears in my eyes. I thought to myself, ‘this is absolutely amazing.’” His freedom restored, he is able to restore hope for others. “He has shown that walking, running and thriving is possible after amputations,” says Kalish.

Following a complete response to stem cell transplant treatment, Fritz is living a full and active life, including regularly playing hockey and golf. His providers continue to celebrate his resiliency, as he often sends updates and photos. “He is a fighter who overcomes life’s obstacles,” concludes Spinney. Vaishali Sanchorawala, M.D., and director of the Stem Cell Transplant Program at BMC adds, “Mr. Gorst’s incredible journey of fighting AL amyloidosis is inspiring to us all.”

Despite his challenging journey, Fritz keeps his family of BMC caregivers close to his heart. “They haven’t stopped caring about me. They haven’t stopped being a part of my life.” ■

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