

College Student Gets Flesh-Eating Disease

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Student battles to save her arms and legs

February 03, 2009 by Christi Myers

HOUSTON (KTRK) — *A college student survived meningitis, a sudden sickness that often ends in death, only to find herself in a new battle with flesh eating bacteria.* In November, Jamie Schanbaum contracted bacterial meningitis. The University of Texas at Austin student had a severe infection and her body almost shut down. Jamie's mother Patsy Schanbaum said, "People were coming in and saying, 'We're amazed that she's alive.'" Jamie survived, but she developed a rare complication. Loss of blood flow had allowed flesh eating bacteria to attack her arms and legs. "My hands were cold and really heavy," Jamie recalled. Dr. Peter Lin, Baylor vascular surgery chief, explained, "Most people don't survive from this dramatic complication." Jamie was now in a new battle to save her arms and legs. Doctors recommended amputating her legs above the knee and both hands. "(She was) perfectly fine one day and the next day facing all these horrible decisions," Patsy said. "It's hard to be here," Jamie said. "I wish I was there. I wish I was in school." Her mother brought her to St. Joseph's Hospital in Houston where *she has received at least 41 treatments in a hyperbaric chamber.* The chamber helps Jamie by giving her concentrated oxygen. That can help her wounds to heal and stimulates new skin to grow. For two hours she lies in a glass tube, hoping the wound treatment works. *Her blackened skin is already regenerating, and her skin shows red where it's new skin that's still changing color.* "This was very severe necrosis and with daily therapy you can see this area has grown new skin," Dr. Lin said. "The doctor in Austin has proposed amputating above the knee. ... Now her skin has completely grown (there)." Jamie's having daily wound care and antibiotics, and she had surgery to improve blood flow. "One of her pills I never would have thought of her taking is Viagra, because it helps with the blood flow in her hands," Patsy explained. Jamie may still needs some amputations, but she's preparing for that. Patsy said, "People with prostheses live incredible lives." Jamie's doctors say they'll continue the treatments as long as they're helping. In Austin, her professors and classmates received antibiotics as a precaution. A meningitis vaccine is recommended for college students, but is not required