Lifesaving Care for Kids

The unique Pediatric Day Program at National Jewish Health *for Kids* helps children and families get answers that they have not been able to find elsewhere. For each patient, the program assembles a multidisciplinary care team — which may include pulmonologists, allergists and behavioral specialists, depending on the symptoms — and explores all possible explanations for the child's condition.

"We organize what we think the tests should be ahead of time, and then when the family gets here, we tailor it," said pediatric pulmonologist and Silverstein Chair of Pediatrics Pamela Zeitlin, MD. "People come in, sometimes with a tentative or presumed diagnosis, and as we go through our diagnostic program, other explanations arise. We tie it all together and send them home with a treatment plan that will help. We individualize the experience on site here for three, five, ten days, depending on what the child needs."

Alexandra Barnett

MYSTERY SOLVED

"She sounded like she was breathing underwater."

That is how Alexandra Barnett's mother Brandi Bryant described it. When Alexandra's mystery lung infection was at its worst, the 12-year-old was still competing in Irish dancing and trying to sing in choir, but her lungs were so congested that her breath sounded like bubbling liquid.

The infection had crept up slowly, starting in the summer of 2023 as a slight cough. Bryant thought Alexandra just had a cold, but it kept getting worse. And nothing helped — not the inhalers from her pediatrician, not the antibiotics or airway clearance device prescribed by her pulmonologist. Her pediatrician was adamant that she go to National Jewish Health.

When Alexandra and her mom arrived here in May 2024 after nearly a year of worsening symptoms, her breathing alarmed the care team right away. She was admitted to the Pediatric Day Program and started seeing specialists who worked together to make a diagnosis.

Test results from Alexandra's home hospital in Oklahoma gave her care team a good idea of what direction they needed to pursue to properly diagnose and treat what her previous doctors had missed. They did a bronchoscopy and found a yeast, a fungus and haemophilus type b (HiB), a bacterium that can cause life-threatening infection. Dr. Zeitlin prescribed treatment for all three, and within days, Alexandra felt much better. She was discharged a week early, and when she returned two months later for a follow-up appointment, Dr. Zeitlin said, "Her chest CT scan had completely normalized."

Thanks to the Pediatric Day Program, Alexandra found answers that her doctors at home had missed for a year — and today, she is breathing better than she did before her infection. She and her mom are grateful they found National Jewish Health.

"They really had her interests at heart," Bryant said.