

MOMENTUM

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Celebrating 140 Years of Philanthropy in the Northwestern Memorial Community

A family's quest for critical neurological surgery

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THE NORTHWESTERN MEMORIAL CAMPAIGN

42,310 Miles to a Cure: The Story of Abdulhadi Alajmi

Thirteen years old and carefree, Abdulhadi Alajmi, the third in a family of seven children in Kuwait, loved school and earned perfect grades. Without warning, in June 2000, he suffered a major hemorrhage deep in his brain. Because of the severity of his illness, he was referred to neurologists and neurosurgeons in Cromwell Hospital in London, England, and subsequently The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center, as it was presumed that he had a brain tumor. After radiosurgery in London, he was left with a limp, a spastic left arm and leg and blindness in his left visual field. Over time, these impairments showed no improvement, and Abdul's family was not happy with his prognosis.



Abdulhadi Alajmi (left) and his father, Mohammad (center) during a post-surgery visit with Dr. H. Hunt Batjer.

Abdul's father, Mohammad, works in the Division of Engineering for the Ministry of Health in Kuwait. Medically astute and determined to improve his son's disability, Mohammad launched a five-year quest for answers to his son's condition. Further visits to the local hospital in Kuwait, Cromwell Hospital and M. D. Anderson Cancer Center left the family perplexed and overwhelmed, because each hospital offered a different surgical recommendation for assorted diagnoses, none of which would have corrected Abdul's condition.

In November 2005, Abdul suffered a second hemorrhage deep in his brain. Desperate to save his son's life, Mohammad worked diligently with the Kuwaiti government for consent to seek medical care outside of their country. Finally, they were allowed to travel again to M. D. Anderson for surgery, where the neurosurgical team repeated the arteriogram and realized that their initial diagnosis had been incorrect. In fact, Abdul was suffering from an arteriovenous malformation (AVM), which is a Medusa's head of dilated arterial blood vessels with

very high flow. These malformations pose a major risk of devastating hemorrhage. Abdul's AVM was located in an area of the brain that was extremely difficult to reach, and physicians recommended referral to only two neurosurgeons worldwide. One of these surgeons was H. Hunt Batjer, MD, chair of the Department of Neurological Surgery at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine.

With the help of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Washington, D.C., and the Kuwaiti Consulate in Chicago, Abdul and his father arrived in Chicago on March 1, 2006. At Northwestern Memorial, intensive testing and imaging confirmed the finding of AVM.

Interestingly, Abdul's second hemorrhage created a potential corridor of access for the surgery; without it, the malformation would have been inoperable. The Cerebrovascular team, including Dr. Batjer, Bernard Bendok, MD, co-director of the Neuroendovascular Program at Northwestern Memorial and assistant professor of Neurological Surgery

and Radiology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, and Christopher C. Getch, MD, neurosurgeon in the Department of Neurological Surgery at Northwestern Memorial Hospital and associate professor of Neurological Surgery at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, utilized advanced imaging capabilities and devised a creative surgical plan. A multidisciplinary team, including Endovascular Surgical Neuroradiology, Neurological Critical Care, Neurological Anesthesiology and the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, converged to provide Abdul with every available resource. On March 15, Dr. Bendok performed an endovascular embolization to reduce blood flow in the area of the AVM. The following

day, Drs. Batjer, Bendok and Getch performed a unique surgical procedure that required 12 hours of microsurgery. A post-operative angiography confirmed that the AVM had been completely removed and that all vital blood vessels had been preserved. Grateful that his son now had a chance for a normal life, Mohammad rejoiced, "Thanks be to God that everything is fine."

Within a couple of days after surgery, Abdul was fully alert, walking and already thinking about returning home to his family and school. Due to his father's determination, the expertise of the team at Northwestern Memorial and his own unrelenting courage and faith, Abdul looks ahead to his upcoming 19th birthday and a future filled with health, hope and possibility. The 14-hour flight home to Kuwait concludes a miraculous 42,310 mile medical journey that led him to a cure.

To learn about philanthropic opportunities within the Neurosciences, please contact Holly Gibout at 312-926-4016. 