

Liver Transplants Save Young Twins

■ Boys Returning To Regular Lives After Surgeries

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Swanson Twins

Four-year-old twins Luke and Jacob Swanson of Arlington Hts.



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By DENISE FLEISCHER Lifestyle Editor | 0 comments

Four and a half year old twins Jacob and Luke Swanson, of Arlington Hts., have a lot to be thankful for.

Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network, as well as their surgeons, were responsible. Gift of Hope is a not-for-profit organ procurement organization that coordinates organ and tissue donation and provides public education on donations in Illinois and Northwest Indiana.

The Swanson boys were born with a condition known as biliary artesia. In the congenital form, the common bile duct between the liver and the small intestine is blocked or absent.

"Generally speaking, we didn't know about it until one month later," explained Robyn Swanson, the boys' mother. "Jacob was born with slight jaundice. No one was overly concerned. We just knew there were digestive issues."

On Oct. 28, 2003, the symptoms were more apparent in Jacob. The Swansons didn't notice them with Luke at first. Lab reports indicated elevated enzymes and bilirubin. They immediately took Jacob to Lutheran General Hospital and met with a hepatologist.

A liver biopsy for Jacob presented damage and abnormality to the liver. The Swansons were then referred to Dr. Peter Whittington and the head transplant surgeon of Children's Memorial in January 2009. The boys underwent surgery, but after six months, the Swansons were informed the surgery didn't work as planned. Jacob was placed on a transplant list in July 2009. Luke was added to the list in October 2009.

"The call came for Jacob in August 2011," said the boys' mother. "We waited for quite awhile. Luke had serious complications along the way. There were a lot of ups and

downs.

"There was a lot of nervous adrenalin and excitement and the realization that someone was on the other end having a terrible day," said Swanson.

Jacob's eight-hour surgery took place Aug. 11, 2011 at Children's Memorial in Chicago. The surgery was successful and 20 days later he came home. His mother reports that he's on track physically and doing well in preschool.

As for Luke, he was not listed for a transplant opportunity immediately. It was when he developed complications with blood flow in 2009 that he was added to the transplant list. Based on lab results, in June 2012, the need for surgery became more apparent.

"It was the middle of the afternoon and Jacob had just come back from a check up when the phone rang," said Swanson. "Luke's transplant surgery ran a little longer, 12 hours, and his turn around time was a few days longer than his brother's."

The boys are both back in school. They enjoy playing soccer and their energy levels and strength have improved.

"When an organ comes from this area, we do have interaction with the donor family," said Alison Smith, vice president of Operations at Gift of Hope. "We engage with them during their time of loss and help them understand the opportunity available to them. So often in a donor situation, it is from an unexpected loss and families are struggling to create a different end to the circumstances."

Loss then evolves into the gift of life.

"It's unbelievable to me what Gift of Hope does," said Swanson who is an Advocate for Hope volunteer. "We've taken the twins to meet their doctors. I can't imagine a more difficult job Gift of Hope and the surgeons do. It takes a special person to do that."

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