

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

The Inspiring Journey of a Multiple Amputee

When Dr. Kellie Lim was an 8-year-old growing up in suburban Detroit, she acquired a case of bacterial meningitis so severe that one physician put her chances of survival at about 15%.

The infection claimed both of her legs about 6 inches below her knees, her right hand and forearm, and three fingertips on her left hand. Her hospital stay lasted 4 months.

"The whole experience was pretty terrifying," said Dr. Lim, who graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles, in May 2007 and is now in a pediatric residency program at the university.

"I was in dreamlike states for the first couple of weeks because I was so ill, so it's very hard to decipher what was going on and what was happening to me physically."

During her hospital stay, the team of physicians who cared for her gave her "weekend passes" to go home and acclimate to life as an amputee.

Those visits "were fun because I was stuck in the hospital for such a long time not seeing my familiar surroundings," recalled Dr. Lim, who learned to use her left hand for primary tasks despite being right handed.

"But it also was a lot of stress on my family. My mother was blind and she was the main person who was going to take care of me, so it was a huge challenge for her, too."

She was fitted with prosthetic legs and used a wheelchair sporadically throughout middle school, high school, and college, but she has not used one in about 5 years.

That's just as well, she said. Since she does not use a prosthetic arm, she would be unable to propel a manual wheelchair and would be relegated to a bulkier motorized version. These days she gets around fine on her prosthetic legs and uses a special turning knob on the



Dr. Kellie Lim credits her success as a doctor to determination: "I haven't found that I've needed too much in terms of physical accommodations."

steering wheel when she drives her car.

She also learned to draw blood and administer injections with one hand. "I haven't found that I've needed too much in terms of physical accommodations," said Dr. Lim, who is now 27 years old.

She credits her bout with meningitis for inspiring her to become a pediatrician. Physicians "saved my life," she said.

Her family supported her efforts to attain that goal, especially her mother, Sandy, who passed away 4 years ago. "My mother was an inspiration," she said. "She had a disability and she was able to have a fulfilling life. My family gave me a lot of support. That led me to do whatever I wanted—to fall flat on my face if I wanted; to succeed and make my own decisions; and to live my life through my own decisions."

Dr. Lim describes her pediatric residency program as "challenging and com-

plicated" but is confident she made the right career choice.

"It's rewarding in that when you ask patients questions, they actually answer them [even if the questions are] very personal," she commented. "I'm a stranger and yet they're able to tell me a lot of things in a straightforward way. That's a different aspect about being a physician that I didn't think about when I applied to medical school."

There are awkward moments, such as when young patients ask, "Why don't you have fingers?" After all, Dr. Lim said, the visit is supposed to be about the patient and his or her concern, not about the physician. "I do acknowledge their question," she said. "I say, 'yes. I don't have fingers. That's a great observation.'"

Then she gets down to business. "You have to put up that divide between being professional and being personal with the patient," she said. "That's a very important thing to keep in mind, to practice that every day."

Dr. Lim's adviser in the residency program, Dr. Virginia M. Barrow, said that Dr. Lim is gifted in engaging young patients. "They really like her and move past [her physical challenges] pretty readily," she said. "She is a very warm person. I think kids in particular pick up on that. She quickly puts her patients at ease, which is an important skill for any resident."

Dr. Barrow also praised Dr. Lim's work ethic. "She sets a very high standard for herself in her patient care, her attention to patients and the families, and her attention to detail in her note writing," she said.

When Dr. Lim reflects on her accomplishments to date, she credits her success to gritty determination. "If I want some-

thing I usually get it," she said, noting that she hopes to specialize in pediatric allergy and immunology after residency. "But I also know that if something I want is not reasonable, I can recognize that and accept that. There are challenges to being a physician, but overall it really fits my personality. I'm not doing it to prove it to anyone or anything like that."

She considers herself "very career oriented because there are specific goals that I can actually see," she said. "I have the ability to affect change now and prepare for it and see it as a concrete goal that will happen at a certain time. That's comforting to me."

When Dr. Lim finds spare time she spends it at home with her boyfriend or with a good book of fiction. She also swims. "Medicine has overtaken my life and I need a break from it when I'm at home," she said. "I read a lot and see my friends as often as I can."

She doesn't sugarcoat the advice she gives to physically challenged physicians. The way she sees it, success comes down to conviction—believing in yourself and in the goals you set.

"Always be aware that failure can happen, but that's not necessarily a reflection on you," she emphasized. "Your life is not a vacuum. It's a combination of events that are beyond your control."

By Doug Brunk, San Diego Bureau

E-MAIL US YOUR STORIES

No one remembers which nature lover first said: "Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints" when in the wild, but it clearly was not a hunter-gatherer. Please tell us about the hunting or fishing traditions in your family. Send an e-mail to d.brunk@elsevier.com.

F Y I

Childhood Obesity Guide

The American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians offers a pamphlet with tips for parents and health care providers for preventing and reducing obesity in children. Tips include limiting video and TV time to 2 hours daily and monitoring portion sizes so they are appropriate for a child's age. For more information, contact the American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians by visiting www.ACOPeds.org.

Preteen Vaccine Campaign

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has launched a national campaign to inform parents, caregivers, and health care providers about recommendations for immunizing 11- and 12-year-olds with MCV4 (meningococcal conjugated vaccine) and Tdap (tetanus-diphtheria acellular pertussis) and HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccines. For easy-to-understand, downloadable educational materials in English and Spanish about the vaccines

and the diseases they prevent, visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines/spec-grps/preteens-adol/07gallery/default.htm.

ADHD Parents Medication Guide

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the American Psychiatric Association have jointly released the "ADHD Parents' Medication Guide." The guide provides information on symptoms, treatment options, types of medications, side effects, and co-occurring disorders. The guide can be obtained at www.ParentsMedGuide.org.

RSV-Tracking Database Site

A redesigned Web site from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now provides data on respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) in the United States, allowing parents and physicians to track the locations of virus outbreaks in their own state and region. The site is located at www.cdc.gov/surveillance/nrevss.

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