

Overcoming a brain tumor has been my greatest triumph and source of strength

By Zack Hubbard,

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“THEY’VE found a brain tumor. You’re going to need surgery to remove it.”

These words shook me to the core, but I quickly realized that this traumatic procedure was inevitable. I also realized that to rid myself of the horrible recurrent seizures that this growing mass called an astrocytoma was triggering, surgery had to be done.

There are few things more frightening to a 14-year-old than experiencing a seizure.

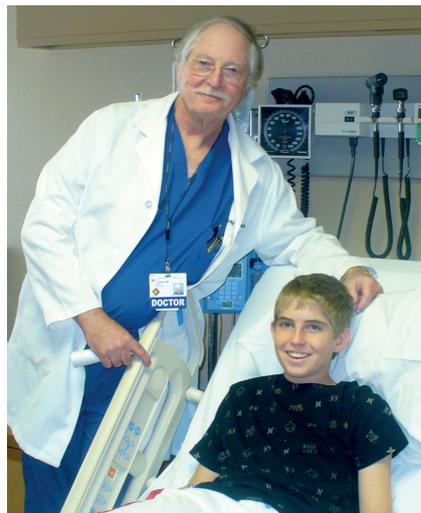
When they occurred, I would have no idea that I was having one, but at the same time, I knew something was wrong. Just as quickly as they would arise, I would come out of the seizure and re-enter the real world. As if I had finished sprinting a marathon, I couldn’t breathe. My heart wouldn’t stop pounding. Just moving was extremely taxing. I’d be exhausted for days afterward.

Seizures take their toll

Because of my epilepsy, I had to give up running track and field completely. Unfortunately, after training for months to run a half marathon, I had a full blown seizure on Christmas Day, and we decided that I would not be able to run in the upcoming race. It was just too risky.

My parents lived in constant fear of the seizures, always dreading the thought of seeing their son convulse uncontrollably once again. Having a seizure approximately once every week during that second semester, I was plagued with relentless anxiety of yet another attack and the overwhelming fatigue that it takes on the body. It’s safe to call this the worst period of my life.

And so, after a sleepless night about three months past initially hearing the news, I underwent the operation



Above: A smiling 14 year old Zack Hubbard recovers from his successful surgery to remove a brain tumour in June 2009. Zack’s surgeon, Dr Rekate, is also pictured.

that would change my life forever. Coincidentally, the seizure I had while registering at Barrow Neurological Institute for my operation would be my last.

Returning to normal life

The unexpected pain following the tumor removal was so excruciating, I cried that I wanted to die, but after several agonizing days in the hospital, and the removal of 17 staples in my head, I was able to go home and start the process of slowly returning to my every day, normal life. Today, I am thrilled to report a near complete recovery.

Though horrifying, this experience has molded me into the person I am today. It has shown me that I have the inner strength to endure anything. This mental toughness has created within me an unbreakable will, a relentless determination that carries over into my academics and my athletic obsession of running.

Striving for greatness and never quitting

Though I am neither the smartest student nor the best athlete, I never settle for mediocrity. I strive for greatness. I pride myself on persevering through whatever hardships that I face, and not just making it out alive, but growing stronger from adversity.

I also have realized how incredibly blessed I am to have survived such a dangerous operation with near-perfect health today. At fundraisers, I see people walking in honor of fallen loved ones. At neurologist checkups, I see children in wheelchairs who can’t talk, children who suffer chronic seizures, children with muscular dystrophy, and children with severe retardation. They are my driving force and my inspiration.

I strive to do all I can to make sure that no child has to go through what I did, or worse.

To help a cause so close to my heart, I have organized teams for the National Brain Tumor Society in the United States three years in a row, raising a total of USD \$5,150.

Efforts which make a difference to someone else’s life

During my final year in Desert Vista High School in Phoenix, and as vice president of the school’s National Honor Society (NHS), I took it to the next level by creating and organizing a 5K Run/Walk for Students Supporting Brain Tumor Research (SSBTR – see www.ssbtr.org).

This required over 100 hours of work to handle every logistical detail, coordinate the tasks of every volunteer, and publicize the event. It was a massive undertaking, but a great success. Over 500 people attended and we raised a total of USD



Above: Zack Hubbard at Thunder Stadium in Phoenix, Arizona - the location for the inaugural brain tumour awareness-raising event he organized on 11th November 2012

\$4,333 to donate to SSBTR. It was such a success that both NHS and SSBTR wanted it to become an annual event.

Now in college at Arizona State University (ASU), I continue my involvement with SSBTR, and have remotely coordinated new high school leaders to oversee the planning of the 2nd Annual 5k for SSBTR at Desert Vista.

Under my close supervision and guidance, they did the groundwork on organizing the 2nd annual 5k for Brain Tumor Research at Desert Vista which took place on 23 March 2014. Some setbacks and rescheduling issues due to the weather limited our attendance, but we still raised over \$3,500 for this incredibly worthy cause. That makes over \$12,000 that I've raised in my lifetime, and I won't be done until there is a cure.

Despite all the challenges we faced, the officers and I are already planning next year's 5k, and I'm certain it will be the biggest year yet. Even if we did not meet the monetary goals of this year's event, we served as an inspiration for people

still fighting today. Giving hope to just one person in need makes it all worthwhile.

My scope will not be limited to this high school event, however. Next year, at ASU, I plan to take charge of SSBTR here, spearheading a campaign to make the university a major factor in SSBTR once again. I plan on organizing an event at ASU, utilizing all the resources -- and people -- at my disposal, to make something truly unforgettable happen.

My ambition is to organize a walk for all 70,000 students at Arizona State University. My dream is to rally thousands of students, both to spread general awareness of brain tumors and to raise funds for brain tumor research.

Fighting epilepsy and a brain tumor has been my life's greatest struggle, but overcoming it has become my greatest triumph and source of strength.

My biggest hope is that my efforts will make a difference in someone's life. ■

*A "freshman" is a first year university student in the United States.



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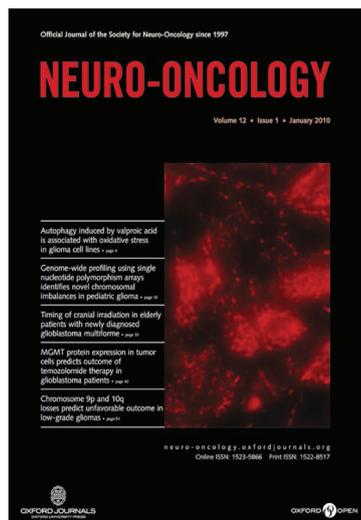
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