

Experimental Gene Therapy Uses Antibiotics To Fight Cancer

(NAPSA)—Here’s something to think about: What would you do if someone you cared about were diagnosed with brain cancer?

What one man did was conduct an exhaustive search to find a treatment that could save his friend’s life.

Kevin Debruhl was diagnosed with glioblastoma multiforme, commonly called GBM, the most aggressive form of brain cancer. He was preparing to go on a camping trip with his wife and two young daughters when he had a seizure that led to the GBM diagnosis. He immediately had surgery to remove the tumor, then started radiation and chemotherapy.

“In an instant I went from being a normal guy with a happy family life, a successful career and an active role in my church to someone facing the very stark reality that I might not live to see the golden years with my wife or watch my daughters grow up,” said Debruhl, a 43-year-old pharmaceutical salesman. “It was very difficult for me to process this.”

Because of the rapidly growing and unrelenting nature of GBM, the average person with Debruhl’s diagnosis lives only 14 months. Unfortunately, even with complete surgical removal of the tumor and the best treatments, some cancer cells are left behind, making tumor regrowth inevitable.

Debruhl decided he wasn’t going to just sit back and wait



While Lee Rumley (left) helped his friend Kevin Debruhl (right) through brain cancer treatments, they found a new procedure that may help many others.

for that to happen, though no treatment was available that would significantly alter his expected lifespan. He had a lot to live for, and he realized he needed to find an experimental treatment option.

Debruhl’s longtime friend Lee Rumley wanted to do anything he could do to help, so he began a relentless search for investigational therapies that were still in clinical development.

“I was searching for information about every glioblastoma clinical trial out there because I wanted to save my best friend’s life,” said Rumley, who first met Kevin when they were roommates in college.

Among the numerous experimental therapies in clinical trials, Rumley identified Toca 511, an investigational gene therapy, as holding the most promise. Toca

511, not yet FDA approved, is being developed by Tocagen Inc.

Toca 511 is a virus that’s injected once into a tumor, where it multiplies and spreads through the cancer cells. Cancer cells infected with Toca 511 then make an enzyme that converts a common antibiotic drug to a powerful chemotherapy drug. Because the anticancer drug is only made in the cells infected by the Toca 511 virus, this treatment has the potential to destroy the tumor while leaving healthy tissue unharmed.

“The Toca 511 clinical trial appeals to me because it is a totally different approach and I think that it has the potential to turn my aggressive cancer into a manageable disease,” added Debruhl. “I don’t know what the future holds but I know that God is working through my family, friends and care providers to help me and others.”

For more information about clinical trials with Toca 511, visit www.clinicaltrials.gov and search for “Toca 511.”

Fortunately, Debruhl’s tumor hasn’t yet recurred, so he doesn’t qualify for the Toca 511 study at this time. If it does, he plans to consider participation in the Toca 511 clinical trials.

Until then, Debruhl will live every moment of his life to its fullest, starting with taking his wife and daughters on their camping trip.