

A B C D E F G H Children's Health

Shriners' Scoliosis Patient E-mails Encouragement

(NAPSA)—Although just 17, Shriners' patient Jessica speaks with the authority and understanding that come from experience. The insights she shares in her e-mail support group, "Str8 Spines for Shriners," ease the fears and worries of patients undergoing treatment for scoliosis.

Jessica, who was diagnosed with scoliosis as a young child, understands the feelings well; she faced them herself just a few short years ago. The cyber-counseling effort is Jessica's way of saying "thank you" to Shriners Hospitals for being there when she needed help.

By the time Jessica was 13, the curvature was so severe that it was causing shortness of breath and irregular heartbeats. Luckily, Jessica's family learned of treatments available at Shriners Hospitals for Children-St. Louis.

In addition to facing spinal fusion surgery, Jessica had to face her fear of the ordeal to come. The physicians at the hospital patiently answered her questions and dealt with her concerns. They also provided her with reading materials and directed her to the hospital Web site for more information.

It was reading about previous scoliosis patients that gave Jessica the courage and confidence she needed. Today, Jessica leads a pain-free, active life.

The teen wanted to share her story, and encourage others who might be struggling with the same fears and concerns she once faced.

"I was inspired by the stories that gave me strength during treatment; I also longed to give back to the Shriners organization that helped me so much," she said.

So, Jessica began the support group. It works like this: Joetta Whorton, R.N., and spine care coordinator at the St. Louis hospital, contacts Jessica if she has a patient anxious about surgery for



Through her e-mail support group, Jessica bravely and generously shares her story of overcoming both fear and scoliosis with others.

scoliosis. Jessica contacts the patient and shares her experiences, and invites the patient to continue to communicate with her.

So far, Jessica has helped six patients, and has received grateful e-mails from parents and even from grandparents.

By sharing her story, Jessica also hopes to spread the word about the work of Shriners Hospitals, and inspire others to join in this great work.

For more information on Shriners' network of 22 hospitals that provide medical care and services totally free of charge to children with orthopaedic problems, burns and spinal cord injuries, write to Shriners International Headquarters, Public Relations Dept., 2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa, FL 33607 or visit the Web site at www.shrinershq.org. Treatment is provided to children under age 18 without regard to race, religion or relationship to a Shriner.

If you know a child that Shriners can help, call 1-800-237-5055 in the United States or 1-800-361-7256 in Canada.