



THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW



Angela Hadley awaits a round of X-rays Friday at Sacred Heart Medical Center, where she has spent nearly a month recovering from the effects of E. coli infection.

Dear journal, I survived summer break

Nearly a month after E. coli outbreak,
brave girl still battling back from infection

By Carla K. Johnson
Staff writer

Angela Hadley should have spent her summer tubing the river, baby-sitting and writing in her journal.

Instead, the girl who was hit hardest in Spokane County's largest E. coli outbreak spent most of the past 27 days — including her 16th birthday — seriously ill in the hospital.

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The Mead High School junior has endured seven sessions of dialysis, three blood transfusions and exactly 73 needle sticks. Her parents have watched her crumple to the floor, unable to walk back to her bed after a trip to the bathroom. They've heard her say, "I think I'm dying."

"It's turned our world upside down."

Mary Hadley
Angela Hadley's mother

"This is how we spent our summer vacation," said Don Hadley, raising his eyebrows to indicate the hospital room, now decorated with helium balloons, flowers and stuffed animals.

"It's turned our world upside down," said Mary Hadley.

The infection began, public health investigators believe, when Angela ate part of a Caesar salad served at a drill-team camp she attended at Eastern Washington University. Illness patterns, food surveys and genetic fingerprinting led investigators to suspect pre-cut ro-

maine lettuce from Spokane Produce.

On Friday, produce company spokesman Dan Petek distributed copies of lab results from tests of lettuce collected by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on July 29 and 30 at the plant. None of the tests found E. coli.

The tests don't necessarily clear the company or earlier lettuce batches, said FDA district director Charles Breen. "The illnesses were associated with lettuce that went through earlier," Breen said.

However it got there, once in Angela's system, the deadly bacterial strain E. coli O157:H7 produced toxins that triggered characteristic symptoms: diarrhea, weakness and vomiting.

"She's my baby. I would trade places with her in a heartbeat."

Don Hadley, Angela's father

She was sick when the Hadleys picked her up from camp on July 14. That night, her fever hit 103.8, and they took her to the Sacred Heart Medical Center emergency room. She was given Tylenol with codeine and sent home with advice to see a doctor if she wasn't better by Tuesday.

She saw her doctor that Tuesday and was back in the ER on Wednesday. While Angela was vomiting in the ER bathroom, she overheard another doctor talking with another patient about dance camp.

"Mom, listen," Angela said.

Another girl from the same camp was there for evaluation, after hearing from a coach about possible E. coli exposure. The Hadleys had missed a similar phone message.

When Don Hadley heard the words "E. coli," he recalled headlines from the 1993 Jack in the Box hamburger outbreak. He knew there had been some deaths. He pulled a nurse aside and said, "All I've ever heard about E. coli is bad news."

But Angela was at a good age to fight the infection, the ER staff said. E. coli's potentially deadly complication — hemolytic uremic syndrome — strikes only the very young and the very old.

During the next few weeks, Angela proved to be an exception to that rule. She developed HUS. Don Hadley looked it up on the Internet and found nothing good.

The E. coli toxins now were destroying his daughter's red blood cells and platelets. That explained her weakness and why her blood wouldn't clot when she had a bloody nose. Her kidneys were working harder, clogged by damaged red blood cells. She grew puffy because her kidneys weren't ridding her body of waste.

The Hadleys knew long-term prospects included abnormal kidney function, even eventual kidney failure. Death occurs in 5 to 15 percent of cases.

"She's my baby girl," Don Hadley said. "I would trade places with her

in a heartbeat."

During the worst of it, Angela was so listless she couldn't look up to acknowledge her parents were in the room. She slept. She lay in bed and moaned.

Angela's doctors, family practitioner Melissa Sousley, kidney specialist Brendan Mielke and pediatric intensivist James Mellema, ordered a central line for IV feeding and dialysis to help Angela's kidneys filter blood.

Mary Hadley felt helpless. She took the night shift and watched over Angela in the dark. She saved her tears for home, believing Angela needed her to be strong.

Don took the day shift and got to know his daughter better during her four-hour dialysis sessions.

"She's as sweet as everybody says she is," he said.

Both parents' employers were generous with time off. Co-workers and friends made sure the family had enough food at home for their 19-year-old son, Aaron.

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Angela's father

Earlier, Angela had asked her mother to take over writing in her journal for her and so Mary was chronicling hospital life. Three times she wrote that Angela had pronounced the day her "new worst day of my life."

It was a family joke. When Angela was 7 and had her tonsils removed, she had said, to her parents' amusement: "This is the worst day of my life."

Although the family kept a low profile, word got out. The Shadle High School drill team, who knew only that another dancer was in the hospital, brought gifts and balloons. Friends left phone messages and sent cards by the dozens.

"We have a lot of people praying for us," Mary Hadley said. "We can feel that strength."

Angela began to slowly get better.

The first meal she kept down was on her birthday last Sunday. A family friend cooked Angela's favorite, fettuccine, using Mary's recipe. On Wednesday, Angela took a walk to the meditation garden on the hospital campus. Angela's doctors believe she is out of danger, but the months to come will tell whether she has any long-term kidney problems.

None of the medical staff has been able to say why Angela, and none of the others stricken in the E. coli outbreak, developed hemolytic uremic syndrome.

They still don't know when she'll go home. Angela still vomits most of her food and doctors are trying to find out why.

Don Hadley said he is learning patience. He's grateful for a chance to slow the hectic pace of his life and for those hours spent talking with Angela while a machine cleaned her blood and pumped it back into her body.

Angela said she's learned how much her parents love her.

"But I knew that already."

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DAN PELLE The Spokesman-Review

Nathan Price and Angela Hadley talk this week about her bout with E. coli after eating tainted lettuce at an EWU dance camp in 2002. The couple plan to marry today.

Agreement puts an end to ordeal

EWU summer campers
were sickened by food

BY JONEL ALECCIA

Staff writer

Four years after she contracted a life-threatening kidney disease in an outbreak of E. coli 0157:H7 infection at a summer dance camp, Angela Hadley is more than ready to put her reputation as "the sick girl" behind her.

"I think I'm done with it," said Hadley, now 20, who was hardest hit by the wave of food-borne illness that sickened more than 50 girls at Eastern Washington University in July 2002.

The red-haired teenager has matured into a college student who wants to become a nurse - and into a new bride who'll take vows in a Spokane ceremony today. As she moves on, she'll get some help through a confidential financial settlement reached this summer with Spokane Produce, the company that local and federal health officials linked to tainted romaine lettuce in the outbreak.

Hadley and her family originally sought \$6 million, sources close to the case said. But Roger Reed, the lawyer who represented Hadley and other less-seriously affected plaintiffs, would say only that the agreement finalized in June was the result of successful mediation.

"We're pleased with the settlement amount under the circumstances," said Reed, who added that he also spoke for Marler Clark, a Seattle firm that specializes in food-borne illness cases.

Hadley was hospitalized for weeks and placed on kidney dialysis after eating prepared salad at the "Just for Kix" summer dance camp at EWU. Nine other plaintiffs joined Hadley's original suit, including five Spokane County girls who attended the camp, three children from a North Idaho family and an adult Spokane County woman who became sick after eating tainted lettuce traced to Spokane Produce. All plaintiffs were dismissed from the suit this summer, Spokane County Superior Court records showed.

Spokane Produce officials were pleased with the settlement as well, although lawyer Greg Arpin noted Friday that the firm maintains that it was not the source of the infection.

"There was never any E. coli found on any Spokane Produce product," Arpin said. "There is no definitive evidence that it was the lettuce."

U.S. Food and Drug Administration officials linked Spokane Produce lettuce to the illness and urged consumers across the nation not to eat it in 2002. A spokesman for the federal agency said the lettuce was traced to Salinas Valley, Calif., but that more specific information was not available.

"In cases such as this it is very difficult to determine the smoking gun," said Mike Herndon of the FDA.

Arpin said Spokane Produce agreed to a settlement to avoid the uncertainty of a jury trial.

Angela's mother, Mary Hadley, said the agreement was fair considering the young woman will continue to grapple with kidney problems related to hemolytic uremic syndrome, HUS, a severe, life-threatening complication of E. coli infection. Angela appears healthy now, but the future remains uncertain, studies of other HUS patients show.

"It's kind of up in the air. We don't know what to expect," Mary Hadley said. "We know we have to keep monitoring her for life."

As part of the settlement, Angela Hadley also will receive \$150,000 from EWU. Four other campers who became ill will receive \$5,000 apiece

from the university. The North Idaho children will receive \$20,000.

"The clear indication was that Eastern didn't do anything wrong," said Amy Clemmons, a Washington state assistant attorney general who represented the university. "Eastern's part of the settlement was really very

small by comparison."

An investigation cleared EWU's food handling procedures.

But EWU was identified as a manufacturer of the food product under state law, which left the institution liable for damages, Clemmons said. By contrast, Spokane Produce was not defined as a manufacturer. Instead, the company was found liable because it advertised and labeled its products as safe and healthy.

EWU has filed a countersuit against Food Services of America Inc., the Delaware firm that transported lettuce from Spokane Produce to the university. The parties are expected to hash out financial responsibility for damages in a trial scheduled for April.

For Angela Hadley, however, the ordeal is over. After her wed-

ding today to Nathan Price, 23, of Nine Mile, she plans to return to school. Her illness has affected her in a number of ways, she said. She plans to be a nurse now, instead of a veterinarian. And she's very careful about food preparation and safety.

"I don't eat lettuce at all," she said. "I go for spinach."

Mary Hadley said that she and her husband, Don, 54, remain grateful for community prayers and support during the crisis. Countless friends and neighbors helped care for the family, which includes son Aaron, 23. Nearly four years of illness and legal wrangling brought the family closer together, but it also took a toll.

"We're just ready to put it in our past," she said.

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