

UPDATE:
The Kuehl family received the best Christmas present ever at Crystal's Dec. 4 check-up at Mayo Clinic. Test results revealed good news, with no more chemo and no return appointment for six months.



For updates on Crystal, Tiffany regularly posts journal entries at crystalsstory.com.

Despite her battle with pancreatic cancer, Crystal Kuehl, 21, values the opportunity to be a role model to her students – in this case, the Tiny Spirits class. Crystal is determined to show them how to face a challenge by dancing through it.

Crystal and her parents went to that life-turning appointment together. Dr. Goedken told them there was a tumor in her pancreas that had spread to her liver. Crystal says, "In my mind, I thought 'I'll have surgery and go home and it will be over.' I was relieved they found something and it wasn't just me being crazy."

Dr. Goedken recommended that they go to Rochester, MN, to Mayo Clinic, where Crystal underwent a week of testing. Tiffany was there with her for every minute, saying, "We were hanging onto each other for support." Tiffany had some experience with cancer, having had melanoma several years ago. "But it's so different when it's your child," she says. During that week at Mayo Clinic, they

learned that Crystal had an unusual form of pancreatic cancer. Surgery was scheduled for the following Monday. Tiffany was allowed to go home to celebrate the 18th birthday of her sister, Courtney, with her family, including her other sister, Cassidy, 16. Then, back to Mayo.

The April 9 surgery, performed by Mayo Clinic general surgeon Dr. Florencia Que, took 12 hours and the news wasn't great. They found more cancer: two tumors in her pancreas and in three lymph nodes. In addition to removing a portion of her pancreas, surgeons treated cancer in her liver by removing portions of the liver and also by using radiofrequency ablation.

Radiofrequency ablation uses electrical energy to create a heat to destroy cancerous tissue deep inside the liver.

After Crystal healed from the surgery, it was time for another scan. She remembers, "I felt really good after the surgery – right away! When I went back to Mayo, I thought I was done. The scans showed everything was healing well."

Then they met with Dr. Joseph Rubin, oncologist at Mayo Clinic, who explained that she would need chemotherapy. The Kuehls assumed Crystal would receive chemo at Mayo Clinic, but the doctor said, "I know you're attached to us, but you can receive treatment at home – there are good doctors at Mercy."

"In our experience here at the Hall-Perrine Cancer Center, it has been easy to coordinate care between here and the Mayo Clinic," says Dr. Wilbur.

"I was disappointed about needing chemo," says Crystal. "I finally felt good – then I had to go back to feeling bad." One silver lining was that she would have oral chemotherapy, so she wouldn't lose her hair. And she'd be closer to home, near her friends and family.

Crystal came to Mercy's Hall-Perrine

Cancer Center every three weeks under the care of Dr. Wilbur. First, a blood test was done to make sure her platelet levels were high enough to receive chemo. Once she cleared that hurdle, she would take 11 pills at intervals throughout the day. Sometimes treatments were delayed due to low platelet levels, which would make her susceptible to blood clots and internal bleeding.

With surgery and chemo behind her, Crystal is now back to living life to its fullest. She loves her dance students and thinks it is important for her to keep teaching as a role model for how to deal with difficult circumstances.

A trip to San Diego in November provided time for Crystal to relax before the next check-up and scan scheduled for Dec. 4.

Waiting is the worst part, says Tiffany, adding, "I worry about a future I have no control over. I say a prayer and focus on other things."

Both Tiffany and Crystal are grateful for the amazing support of family,

friends, the community and the C.R. Spirits dance studio members. More than 800 people attended a dance-a-thon held in Crystal's honor. And the C.R. Spirits Professional Dance Team surprised them by wearing purple (purple is the color for pancreatic cancer) jerseys during their performance at the Purple Stride walk/run in Rochester, where Tiffany spoke to survivors.

Tiffany says, "Going to the dance studio is like therapy. Every one of those girls has a story. The dance floor is therapy. I realize now that it is helping her (Crystal)."

Meanwhile, Crystal stays focused on being positive. She says, "I take more time for myself. I walk, meditate and think positively. It could be so much worse. I am still doing what I want to do."

"I know you're attached to us, but you can receive treatment at home – there are good doctors at Mercy."

*Dr. Joseph Rubin
Oncologist at Mayo Clinic*



Mark Goedken, MD
Family Physicians of Cedar Rapids



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For more information on Hall-Perrine Cancer Center, visit www.hallperrinecancercenter.org or call (319) 365-HOPE (4673).

