

SEPSIS

awareness

READ HOW EARLY DETECTION OF SEPSIS WAS A “LIFE-SAVER” FOR ONE OF OUR OWN, SANDIE HILL FERRIGNO.

Can you believe that in the United States alone, sepsis takes a life every two minutes? This statistic is alarming. Reducing sepsis mortality is one of our key areas of clinical focus at SSM Health, with one of our True North Statements centered on Sepsis: “We will deliver the highest quality, safest and most affordable health care services, exceeding expectations for every person we encounter.”

For Sandie Hill Ferrigno, Senior HR Leader at SSM Health Wisconsin, starting a new job in Texas signified a new beginning. She moved from Cincinnati, Ohio to Texas for a new job, but her husband and two small children stayed in Cincinnati to tie up loose ends. Four weeks later, her family visited her for the first time. She was so excited to see them, but just didn't feel right. She felt run down, tired and exhausted and chalked it up to the move and excitement. But, little did she know a storm was on her horizon.

After the visit with her family, Sandie started experiencing flu-like symptoms, including a fever, body aches and nausea. Within a very short time, she was shivering, vomiting uncontrollably and barely able to move. Feeling sicker than she could ever remember, she contemplated calling an ambulance but convinced herself it was just a bad case of the flu. She decided to stick it out until the worst had subsided, but that didn't happen.

Her symptoms continued to worsen; even though it was a new job, she needed to call in – she was too sick to work. She was confused and disoriented and felt just awful. But she is here today because of one employee who cared enough and took the time to help. Sandie hardly knew anyone and the last thing she wanted was for one of her employees – a stranger – showing up at her door while she was in this condition. But he persisted and came to her house to see if he could help.



After he saw Sandie, he convinced her to go to the doctor, but nothing was open at that hour. So ... they headed to the Emergency Department. Within minutes, her patient room was crowded with a swarm of doctors and nurses. They ran tests, hooked her to many gadgets and started whispering to one another. She remembers noticing the look of anguish on her nurse's face, and she got scared. She knew something was very wrong. The diagnosis came in - she had pneumonia **and** sepsis.

Here she was, alone in a strange city, all by herself. Sandie didn't realize how sick she was. After three days alone in her room, she finally broke down. She was unhinged and terrified. Her nurse so selflessly held her hand and stood beside her through the fear. She felt hopeless, but it was the small, personal things, the offer of "special tea", and the way the nurse listened with such patience and empathy, that gave Sandie the strength she needed to prevail.

Sandie was in denial and couldn't understand how this happened to her. It always happens to the other guy. So, she tried to do this without worrying her family and soon realized her reality and the true impact of the illness. She needed help. Unable to even get in and out of the bed on her own, she finally called her husband who quickly came to Texas to be by her side.

After ten days, Sandie was finally released – she wanted to go home. But, before she left the Hospital, she asked to talk to the ER doctor who was whispering in her room. He looked at Sandie and said, "I was telling my colleague that my only goal was to keep you alive through the night." WOW! This stopped Sandie in her tracks and gave her the will to continue her fight.

It took Sandie months to feel well enough to return to work and even now, nine years later, she gets nervous when she or those she loves gets sick. She often wonders what would have happened if she didn't go to the Hospital? And the doctor didn't recognize her symptoms? What made that nurse hold her hand and help her through her fears? And what made her new colleague care enough to help? She is so grateful for the doctor who was whispering in her room and took immediate action. She pays forward the kindness her nurse gave to her. And she stays in touch with her 'old' colleague and sends him a gift of appreciation every March – for nine years.

This is a story about one of our own – part of the SSM Health family. It is a story about how important it is for all of us to recognize the signs and symptoms of sepsis, and initiate treatment as soon as possible. Sandie's story is one of strength, perseverance and hope. Early detection of Sepsis can save lives!