

Active wife, mother and elected official rallies back after battling West Nile, Meningitis and Guillain-Barre

Deb Spanyers is a mother, wife, daughter and an elected official. In August 2006, her roles were threatened when a mosquito bite later developed into West Nile virus, Meningitis and Guillain-Barre syndrome.

Deb's body was working against her. She had to fight even to hold her head up. When she wanted to lift her arms and hug her teenaged daughters, Morgan and Erica, she couldn't. The girls watched as their mother, who they knew as a spirited woman, rapidly lost regular abilities. When Deb wanted to tell her husband Keith that she appreciated him at her side even though their family farm in rural Nebraska needed his attention, Deb didn't even have the strength to squeeze Keith's hand. She wanted to tell her mother Dorothy how grateful she was for her care, but her face and mouth had begun to droop and she couldn't speak.

Although it seemed her body was failing her and she struggled to do the things that once came so easily, she continued to fight. Carol Olson, inpatient physical therapist, remembered that when Deb arrived at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital, there were times when Deb was afraid to participate in some of her exercises because she didn't trust her body. "But she always trusted us and worked so hard during her rehabilitation," Carol shared.

In time, Deb was able to advance from two people helping her with slide board transfers to needing only one person for assistance. Using adaptive equipment like leg loops, slide boards and reachers, Deb was able to transfer and dress herself on her own. "It was through my team that I learned how to get myself dressed," Deb said.

Even though Deb now admits that there were times when she wasn't sure she could do it, she was determined because she had belief and support from her team. "The therapists at Madonna are amazing. It's obvious they love

their job. Any obstacle that confronted me, they found ways to make workable solutions. They work as a team," Deb said.

In April 2006, Deb transitioned to Madonna's outpatient program where she continues to work two days a week on land, the ERGYS II functional electrical stimulation bike and in the pool. It was shortly after that time when Deb began thinking about returning to work as Saline County Treasurer. The possibility caused both excitement and trepidation. She was concerned that she wouldn't be able to fulfill her role at the level she had always worked. The people of Saline County undoubtedly believed in her when they re-elected her as treasurer in November 2006. Deb values her role and is grateful for the support she had in returning to work and in giving back to the citizens she serves.

At first, Deb's goal was simply to walk again, but said it was with direction from the therapists and nurses that she was able to create small goals that would motivate her and keep her working toward her ultimate goal. On "Parents' Night" at Dorchester High School in January 2007, Deb was able to walk across the gym with Keith and her daughters to be recognized at halftime during the basketball game. Deb continues to build strength and endurance. All the while, her positive attitude is contagious. "She is cheerful and encouraging to other patients and families. She is the epitome of working hard toward rehabilitation goals," said Jessica Foster, Deb's outpatient physical therapist. "Deb has worked hard to get back to her life with her family, job and community. In spite of changes in her mobility, she continues to lead a busy and active life," added Jessica.

Deb Spanyers is a mother, wife, daughter and an elected official. She is also a survivor, fighter and victor. Deb was honored as one of the 2007 Madonna Chairman's GoalA-ward recipients.



From left: Erica, Morgan, Deb and Keith spanyers at the family's home in Dorchester, Neb.