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"How Optimism Has Paved My Road to Success"

Imagine sitting in a doctor's office and hearing you are the fourth generation in your family to be diagnosed with a chronic disease. You feel sick daily, have lost roughly 20 pounds without trying, and when people look at you, you know they know your secret.

I am sick.

In 2021, I was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease—an inflammatory bowel disease. My great grandpa had it, my grandma has it, my mom has it, my brother has it, and my sister has it. It's a long line of tragedy. It sucks all my energy, and it makes daily planning a difficult task without knowing what my body is going to do. (This is no way for a teenager to live)!

I was confident I was in the clear of getting this diagnosis because my mom was much younger than I was when she received her diagnosis. I've learned that's not how life works. Sometimes "hard" happens, and it's up to us—up to me—to decide how we'll respond. This is one moment that, even though it took a toll and I felt physically awful, I chose to walk the path of positivity and see what growth I could make as an individual.

That first day on the way to the gastroenterologist for my appointment, I watched tears stream down my mom's face (Mom guilt is real-life). She was crying because she felt it was her fault I was carrying on our family's intestinal legacy. While genes play a part, no friend or foe would wish this on their worst enemy. In that moment though, what my diagnosis did do, was help my mom and I grow closer together, bonding over something much bigger. Together we're

stronger, and because of her and the rest of my family, I am regularly reminded I can navigate this too. It's important to grow in your circumstances and remember the best is yet to come.

Remember when I said earlier, "When hard happens, it's up to me to decide how I'll respond"? So what's life like for me these days? (I know you're wondering.) About every eight weeks I travel two hours to receive an intravenous infusion to help keep my disease under control. The infusions last about two hours. It is a nice time to step away from usual daily activities, especially knowing it's these two hours every eight weeks that keep me as healthy as I can be.

I have developed strong relationships with my nurses at the GI Infusion Clinic. Blake and Hannah have become my new BFFs, adding in occasional pointers on how I should get my nursing degree and what classes they think I will benefit from the most. In fact, Blake and Hannah are two of the biggest reasons I decided to go into the nursing profession. Their empathy in the face of difficulty inspires me to be that type of nurse—kind, encouraging, personable, optimistic, and loving.

I am so excited to become a pediatric nurse, touching the lives of children and their parents in some of life's most vulnerable moments. I am passionate about blazing a new trail that's focused on empathetic and optimistic healthcare. Having a kind and caring nurse, who wants to watch their patient get better, is the type of nurse everyone hopes for and deserves. I can be the difference-maker in a healthcare setting by being positive and assisting my patients in seeing the good.

Crohn's Disease isn't the easiest thing in the world, but the personal gain far outweighs the physical difficulty. If anything, it's taught me to expect the unexpected and that even in the hard moments, there's always good to be found.

No one expects to wake up one morning and receive a chronic disease diagnosis—something that will affect me every day for the rest of my life. But it happens, and it happened to me. Despite the IVs, fast and furious marathons to the bathroom, and the occasional worst-stomach-ache-you've-ever-had-feeling, I wouldn't change what I have gone through. My optimism has helped pave my road to success.

Someone needs my story, and that's why someday in the not too distant future, I may just greet you at your bedside with a "Hello, I'll be your nurse this shift."