

Good Afternoon,

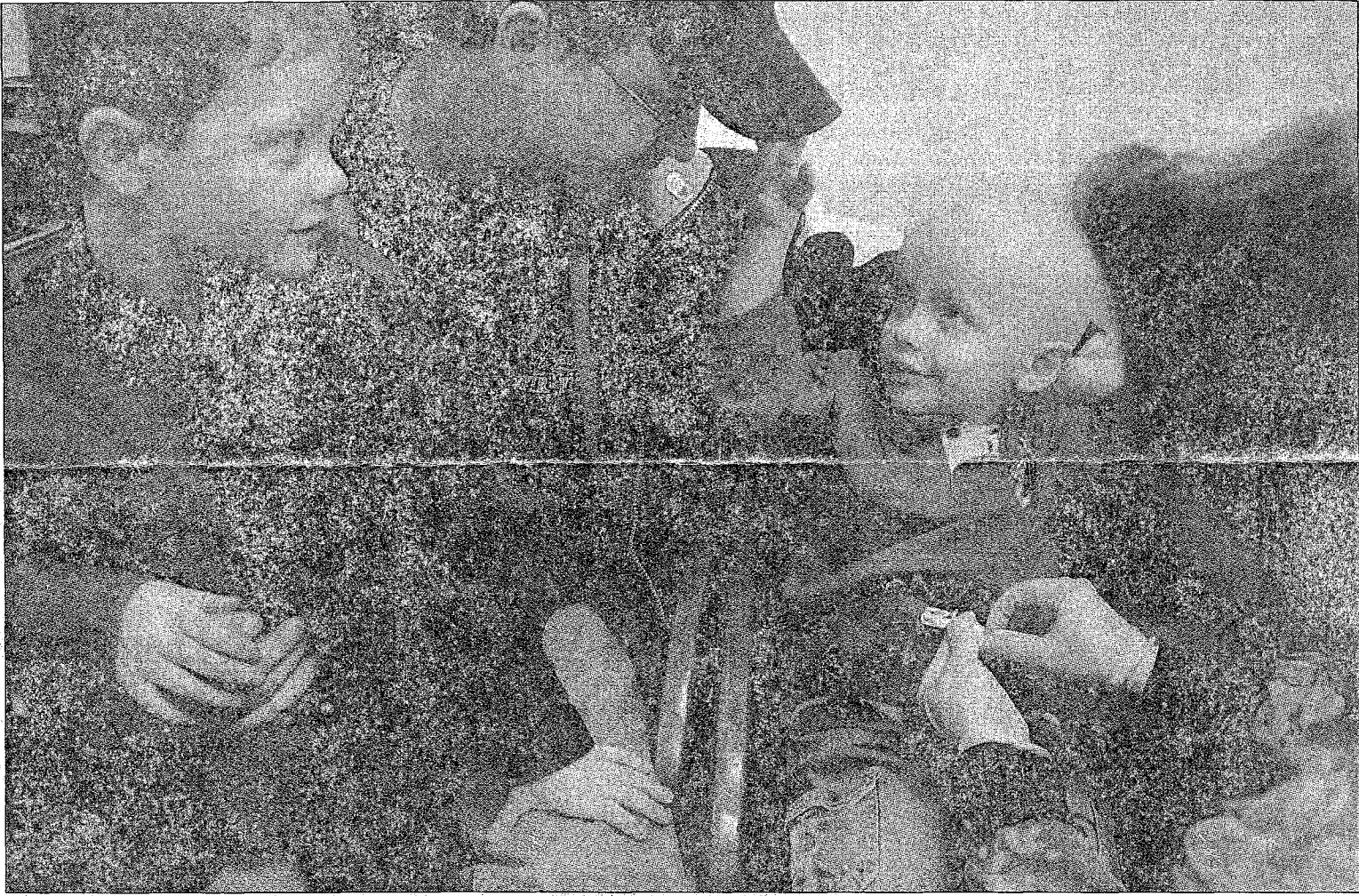
The Cooper Urbaniak family is requesting to have Cooper Urbaniak added to your prayer chain. Cooper is 3 years old, he has been diagnosed with metastasized ependymoma. He had surgery to remove a brain tumor in November 2007. Another surgery to remove a spinal tumor was done in July 2008. He is in need of a stem cell transplant to save his life.

I have attached an article from the January 5, 2009 Rapid City Journal.

Please pray for our little Cooper!

The Family of Cooper Urbaniak

LIFE OR DEATH: Urbaniak family and Sanford Health Plan are headed to court over nearly \$400,000 in treatments needed to stop a child's brain tumor.



Photos by Kristina Barker/Journal staff

Three-year-old Cooper Urbaniak, right, was diagnosed with ependymoma, a rare type of brain tumor, in October 2007. Cooper sits with his father, Joe Urbaniak, center, and brother, Bailey, left, during his appointment. Sanford Health Plan, the Urbaniak's care provider, is denying the Cooper's claim for treatment.

Family fights for boy's cancer care

Insurance says specialized treatment is experimental, won't pay for it

By Lynn Taylor Rick
Journal staff

Cooper Urbaniak's doctors want to treat his brain tumor with high-dose chemotherapy and a stem-cell transplant. His insurance provider, Sanford Health Plan, doesn't want to pay the nearly \$400,000 bill.

The stalemate has landed both parties in 7th Circuit Court with the Urbaniaks' attorney, Mike Abourezk of Rapid City, asking the court to act soon on what he sees as a life or death situation.

The complaint "is asking that the company be required to provide the treatment, and I'm asking for a trial inside the month of January which is pretty extraordinary,"

Abourezk said. "Every day that you wait gives that tumor a chance to rebound and if the tumor rebounds, that's it. He's no longer eligible to go forward with the high-dose chemotherapy."

Three-year-old Cooper started suffering from nausea and vomiting in October 2007. His parents, Joe and Missy Urbaniak of Hereford, assumed he had a stomach bug. But after three weeks of ongoing illness, doctors ordered a CT scan and discovered the source of the problem. Cooper had a mass at the base of his brain, which was blocking spinal fluid.

Missy, a teacher at a rural



Cooper Urbaniak has a scar on his head from where doctors removed a brain tumor in November 2007. Urbaniak has had two surgeries, one to remove his brain tumor and another to remove a tumor that had metastasized in his spine in July 2008.

CANCER CARE: Sanford Health Plan rejected doctors' appeals.

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school in Hereford, remembers getting the call from Joe at noon on Halloween day that a tumor had been found.

By 5 p.m., she and Cooper were LifeFlighted to the University of Minnesota Children's Hospital in Minneapolis.

Doctors operated on Cooper Nov. 2, warning the family that the surgery could have massive consequences, from drooping facial muscles to blindness. But Cooper surprised them all, rebounding from the surgery with almost no side effects, Missy said. "Doctors were very pleased."

Cooper's tumor was diagnosed as an ependymoma, a rare brain tumor. In children, ependymoma tumors are most commonly found at the base of the brain where Cooper's grew.

Doctors suspect Cooper may have always had the tumor, but only began experiencing problems as it grew larger.

After the surgery, doctors warned the Urbaniaks that Cooper had a 50 percent chance of a reoccurrence. And in July 2008, a MRI showed a new tumor had grown on Cooper's spine. He underwent another surgery to remove that tumor in July.

That's when physicians at the University of Minnesota Children's Hospital suggested that Cooper be treated with high-dose chemotherapy followed by a stem-cell transplant.

And that's when the debate over coverage began.

Sanford Health Plan notified the family in August that the treatment would not be covered, calling it "experimental/investigational."

Doctors at University of Minnesota appealed the finding, but their appeals were also rejected.

Ryan Bohy, chief administrative officer for Sanford Health Plan, said he can't talk specifically about the case because of patient privacy laws and legal restrictions, but said the company feels for the family and continues to work with them. "I can tell you that this family has been



Kristina Barker/Journal staff

Cooper Urbaniak helps squeeze water out of a syringe into a permanent central line in his chest after having blood drawn Dec. 30 at Black Hills Pediatrics & Neonatology. Urbaniak's doctors are recommending a treatment of high-dose chemotherapy followed by a stem cell transplant. The stem cells would be Cooper's own, harvested after he was healthy between chemotherapy treatments. Doctors would like to start the treatment near the end of January to prevent the tumor from growing.

treated fairly," he said.

The complaint, filed Dec. 22, argues that Sanford Health Plan has based its decision on an incomplete assessment of a 2007 study on ependymoma tumors. According to the complaint, the study found that children with localized ependymoma responded poorly to the high-dose chemotherapy regimen. Children like Cooper, who had metastasized ependymoma (a tumor that has spread), responded much better.

In fact, the survival rate was 80 percent, which the study's authors called "encouraging," Abourezk said.

Abourezk said the Sanford Health Plan's physician who reviewed the request for treatment omitted the portion of the study noting the survival rate for metastasized ependymoma and only focused on the less favorable results for localized tumors.

The complaint argues that the procedure is neither experimental nor investigational and is clearly covered under the Urbaniaks' health care plan.

The complaint also notes a May 2008 Wisconsin Supreme Court decision, which was based on a similar case of a 3-year-old boy with ependymoma who was denied coverage for high doses of chemotherapy followed by stem-cell transplant. The court found for the boy's

family, calling the insurance company's decision "arbitrary, capricious and improper," according to the complaint.

The patient, who received treatment through other sources while the case made its way through the courts, is now healthy after successful treatment, according to the complaint.

Although that's a happy ending for the Wisconsin boy, Abourezk says Cooper doesn't have the same luxury.

Without coverage, the Urbaniaks are not able to cover the medical bills. And without treatment, Cooper may not survive.

He is currently undergoing conventional chemotherapy to see whether the tumor cells are responding. So far, they seem to be, which indicates that the high-dose chemo and stem cell transplant will be successful, Missy said.

The fight over coverage has clearly added to the Urbaniaks' burden. When Cooper was diagnosed, Missy was already seven weeks pregnant with Everett, now 6 months old. The family also has a 5-year-old son, Bailey.

"We have all we can handle taking care of Cooper and the other two boys," Missy said. "We just want them to do the right thing and take care of the treatment ... and time is important here."

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