

3 Comments 0 Recommend Recommend 88

Search advanced search | archives  
 GO  
 Chron.com Web Search by YAHOO!

# Medical summit to focus on pediatric cancer fight

Goal is to overcome obstacles to treatment

By U.S. REPS. MICHAEL McCAUL and JOE SESTAK  
 Congressional Pediatric Cancer Caucus  
 Sept. 14, 2010, 9:23PM

## Share

- Del.icio.us
- Digg
- Twitter
- Facebook
- StumbleUpon
- Email

Recommend 88 people recommend this.

Six-year-old Max Plotkin was having trouble reading. Although his fellow students were moving on to chapter books, Max was barely able to get through *Green Eggs and Ham*. His father, David, suspected Max only read certain sentences because he had memorized them and merely recited them. Naturally, Max, who less than two years earlier had scored in the 99th percentile in a kindergarten entrance aptitude test, began to detest reading. He recognized the growing gap between him and his peers and as happens with many students who fall behind, Max started to feel self-conscious.

David and his wife Annemarie brought Max to a neuropsychologist who evaluated Max's condition. The test, which cost thousands of dollars, was originally conducted to see whether Max suffered from chemo brain, a term which describes changes in the brain caused by chemotherapy. In 2007, the day before his 4th birthday, Max had

been diagnosed with a rare B-cell Lymphoma, which was stage four and never before seen by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Max fought the disease for more than two years. While he and his family are grateful for Max's recovery, his remission is tempered by a lifetime of unknown side-effects from both the disease and the treatment.

This is the bittersweet reality for three out of every five children who survive childhood cancer but experience long-term effects, some of which are life-threatening. Pediatric cancer still takes the lives of too many kids, and remains the leading killer of children by disease. While we are thankful for the significant advances in treatments for some childhood cancers, we have much more to learn before all diagnosed children will have the ability to live full and happy lives.

The main obstacle is funding. Hundreds of billions of dollars are spent each year on cancer treatment and research, but studies and drug development specific to pediatric cancers remain woefully underfunded. Unfortunately, new drugs and treatments are few and far between, largely because private companies lack the ability to generate significant profit from them. Drug companies have also been reluctant to develop products specifically for childhood cancer patients, in part because of the liability risk that they take when testing drugs on young children.

Private organizations, such as The Max Cure Foundation founded by Max's family, have successfully raised money for a variety of childhood cancer programs. Yet the federal government has made only very modest investments in research through the National Cancer Institute (NCI). For every six research dollars per patient with AIDS and every one research dollar per patient with breast cancer, a child with cancer receives only 30 cents. To us, and the families of the 35 children diagnosed with cancer each day, it is clear that much more needs to be done to ensure access to treatment and the opportunity to fully recover.

That is why the bipartisan Congressional Pediatric Cancer Caucus, which we founded last year, is convening a Childhood Cancer Summit in Washington on Sept. 16. In observance of Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, top doctors and researchers from across the country representing institutions such as Memorial Sloan Kettering in New York, Houston's M.D. Anderson and Texas Children's Hospital and Children's Hospital of Philadelphia will join with lawmakers on Capitol Hill to bring attention to the challenges we face and ideas to solve them. We will discuss how we can overcome the obstacles to drug development and access to treatments, and how we can ensure a better quality of life for those who survive their fight with pediatric cancer.

The summit is critical in raising the level of awareness, not just among the general public, but also among policymakers. Our goal is to fashion the recommendations from our experts into a legislative agenda and gain the support of our colleagues in the House and Senate.

Members of Congress need to understand the importance of a rededication to pediatric cancer research and should recognize that the needs of children who confront this disease are often vastly different than those associated with other forms of cancer.

The future of Max and hundreds of thousands more of America's children living with cancer depends on action from both the public and private sectors. We hope that our summit and sustained focus on this issue will help to eliminate childhood cancer and provide more of our nation's youth with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

McCaul, a Republican from Austin, and Sestak, a Democrat from Pennsylvania, are founders and co-chairs of the Congressional Pediatric Cancer Caucus.

**12 SUNDAYS FOR THE PRICE OF 8** **Subscribe now!**

**Five Colleges.**

**One focus. Your career success.**

» Start Here

- Most read | Most commented
- [Chase through east Houston ends in crash, arrest](#)
  - [Hurricane season could stay busy](#)
  - [Texans add veteran defensive linemen Denney, Ogunleye](#)
  - [Harris deputy injured in gunfire with bank robbers](#)
  - [Confrontation leads to teen's fatal shooting in Pasadena](#)

- More stories | Related stories
- [Froma Harrop: Little reason to support Christo's Colorado project](#)
  - [Thomas Friedman: China content to play the 'gentle giant' — for now](#)
  - [Medical summit to focus on pediatric cancer fight](#)
  - [Letters: A call for self-sacrifice](#)
  - [Another voice: Drug cartels' reliable weapons supplier — the U.S.](#)
  - [George Will: The clunker school of economics](#)
  - [Paul Krugman: Now's the time to stand up to China](#)

Sometimes what looks like a smart way to invest your money is really just a scam. Scam artists are experts at making bad deals sound great — so anyone is prey.

**Learn how to outsmart the scammers before it's too late.**

In partnership with Chronicle In Education