



My Year as a Medical Faculty for Texas P2P

Maureen Benschoter

Two years ago, my son George sustained a severe, permanent brain injury from a choking accident. One year ago, I became a family faculty member for the Texas Parent to Parent program, Medical Education (Med). Little did I know that by stepping up to volunteer for this program, I would not only be making a meaningful contribution to the education of medical professionals, but I would be nurturing my own healing from George's injury and its impact on our family.

The purpose of the MEd program is to introduce future doctors to the ins and outs of daily life for families with a medically complex child. Medical students and residents visit a faculty member (like me) in their home, and spend an intense two hours learning our children's stories and following us through the daily regimen of care. For many of them, this will be the only time in their whole careers that they get an in-depth look at a patient outside a medical office or hospital setting.

The young doctors are respectful, attentive, and appreciative. Sometimes they cry when they hear George's story. Almost uniformly they express awe for the tremendous amount of work required to manage George's care. Without this home visit, they simply would have no idea of the daily lives of families like mine.

During our meetings, I stress that although George's care is difficult, it is not a burden. When they encounter him as a patient, he may be sick and miserable, but at home he is mostly happy and relaxed. I try to make sure their visit captures the moment when he arrives home on the school bus. He loves riding the electric lift from the bus to the sidewalk; it always makes him laugh. That's an important part of the whole picture that I want these future doctors to see: my laughing boy home from school, the two of us enjoying a fairly ordinary experience together.

In addition to the education of medical professionals, an unforeseen benefit of the MEd program has been its contribution to my own healing over the past year. I think the healing lies in the power of story telling. I'm a big believer that as humans, articulating our experiences, especially the painful ones, helps us recover. Telling George's (and mine, and my family's) story again and again to interested, sympathetic listeners (the medical students and residents) has brought me a measure of peace. It still doesn't make sense that my active, vibrant child now

Texas Parent to Parent

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has to live the rest of his life trapped in a body with spastic quadriplegia. It is unfair, and awful, and tragic. But telling his story, having it known, grants us all a bit of grace, keeps us from feeling isolated, validates the struggle. I wish George could speak it himself; I am honored to do so for him.

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