



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Department of Neurosurgery

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

### For Immediate Release

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## Cushing's Disease Patient Has Remarkable Transformation

AURORA, COLORADO (December 3, 2020). Shannon C., a young mother of two, struggled for years with unusual bruising on her legs, anxiety, depression, significant weight gain and, ultimately, broken bones before finally landing in the Department of Endocrinology at the CU School of Medicine. There, she was quickly diagnosed with Cushing's Syndrome and sent to Kevin Lillehei, Neurosurgeon, Chair of the Neurosurgery Department and Director of the Neurosurgery Pituitary Tumor Program at the Anschutz Medical Campus.

Cushing's Syndrome is rare. An estimated 10-15 per million people are affected every year. It most commonly affects adults ages 20 to 50 and is more prominent in females. Cushing's syndrome is a disorder caused by the body's exposure to an excess of the hormone [cortisol](#). Cortisol affects all tissues and organs in the body. These effects together are known as Cushing's syndrome. In Shannon's case, she had an excess production of cortisol from a tumor in her pituitary gland. Cushing's syndrome can also be caused by overuse of cortisol medication, as seen in the treatment of chronic asthma or rheumatoid arthritis or excess production of cortisol from a tumor in the adrenal gland or elsewhere in the body.

Most cases of Cushing's syndrome are not genetic. However, some individuals may develop Cushing's syndrome due to an inherited tendency to develop tumors of one or more endocrine glands. In Shannon's case, no one in her family has ever had anything like this.

Common symptoms include weight gain, skin changes, excessive hair growth, female baldness, generalized weakness and fatigue, blurry vision, vertigo, menstrual disorders in women, severe depression or mood swings, slow or poor wound healing and more. Because many of these symptoms can be a sign of numerous differing conditions, Cushing's Syndrome is hard to diagnose. Thanks to the endocrinology team at CU, Shannon's case was finally properly diagnosed and caught. After proper imaging, the tumor was easy to see and, once removed, the symptoms began to fade.

Now, a year later, Shannon has dropped weight, she is less anxious and depressed, and she feels physically stronger than she used to. "I am so grateful for the entire endocrine team at University Hospital," she states. "And, I was so comfortable with Dr. Lillehei and his confidence that we could finally cure this thing."

Her prognosis is good. "We are thrilled with the progress that Shannon has made over this past year," says Lillehei, her neurosurgeon. "Cushing's Disease is a serious, life threatening disorder, where

outcomes are clearly correlated with treatment by an experienced multi-disciplinary team of dedicated health care providers.”

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