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Amid turmoil, Lake Stevens family focuses on the good

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LAKE STEVENS — The Wood family has had a rough year.

Blake, 8, was diagnosed with epilepsy after undergoing three intense seizures at school, each of which landed him in the intensive care unit.

Then, in April, just when Blake's epilepsy was brought under control with drugs, his father, Devin, 44, was diagnosed with late-stage cancer in his tongue and lymph nodes.

He's been given a four-in-10 chance of surviving. He's been bedridden for two months because of the treatments and unable to work.

Still, the family is upbeat and has faith that all will be OK.

"We really believe God is healing him, we really do," Tami Wood said of her husband.

People in their own church, the Adventure Church of Everett, are praying for them, and people in other churches are as well, Tami Wood said.

"There are a lot of people praying," she said.

Other bright spots have popped up. Paramedics and firefighters at Lake Stevens Fire District 8 are pitching in \$2,500 to buy the family of five a four-day trip to Disneyland when Devin is feeling up to it.

Some of the paramedics have gotten to know the family pretty well. Six of the 15 who work at the district responded to at least one of Blake's three seizures, said paramedic Eric Jones.

"Two medical problems that are going on with their family, that's the thing that struck me the hardest," Jones said.

"We wanted to do something for them," to get their minds off their situation, he said. "The family is super nice."

The medics stayed with the family at the hospital after each episode until Blake was stabilized and call to check up on him, Tami said.

The medics have gotten briefings from nurses at Blake's school, Sunnycrest Elementary, about his condition, and the nurses take turns watching out for Blake at school, his mother said.

The family's received a lot of support from others in the community as well, Tami said.

"It's just amazing," she said.

Jones said he was there for one of Blake's seizures. They had to give the boy a lot of drugs to bring it under control because it was so strong, he said.

Tami, a stay-at-home mom, was busy with her youngest daughter, Brielle, 3, and had the phone turned off. Devin received a call at work and reached a neighbor to contact Tami.

When Tami arrived at school, she saw Blake being loaded into the ambulance. His eyes were open and stuck in a looking-up and to the side position, she said.

"He was completely flopped and down and out," she said.

They had no idea before that he had epilepsy, so it was suspected that the first episode, in January, was caused by an aneurysm, Tami said. Blake was airlifted to Harborview Medical Center.

The next two episodes were nearly identical to the first, both occurring at school, Tami said.

"They were all really scary," she said.

Now, the family's attention is focused on Dad. He recently finished a round of chemotherapy and won't know what his next course of conventional treatment will be until a round of tests in early October.

Since Devin is unable to eat, he now has a feeding tube hooked into his stomach.

"Medical stuff doesn't bother me so much anymore," said Brittney, the Woods' 11-year-old daughter.

Meanwhile, Devin and Tami have begun an alternative treatment aimed at increasing his body alkalinity, because cancer thrives in an acidic environment.

"I know I don't want to walk around with a four-in-10," Tami said, referring to the odds given her husband by doctors handling the conventional treatment.

They're not sure when they'll be able to go to Disneyland.

Brielle keeps asking, "Daddy, are you feeling better yet, are we going to Disneyland?" Tami said.

Tami's parents have come up from Oregon to stay with the family and help out. Insurance from Devin's job at Idearc Media in Everett is covering most of Devin's treatments, and he's getting short-term disability payments of \$1,300 per month. Still, for a family of five, that's not much.

With Devin bedridden and three kids to care for, Tami hasn't had time to work.

"We're not looking for a handout," Tami said, but she knows that more people will want to help.

She's a singer in the contemporary Christian style and is thinking of dusting off an album that she started producing three years ago before she got pregnant with Brielle.

In another bright spot, the family just adopted a mama cat and her three, 5-week-old kittens.

"New life, straight from heaven," Tami Wood said.

"There's so much love around us."

How to help

A benefit bank account has been set up to help the Wood family. Contributions may be made to the Wood Family Benefit Fund at any Wells Fargo Bank branch.

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