

Rodeo Dental Patient Joseph Garza is the Only Child in Texas with ALS

ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, affects as many as 30,000 Americans at any given time. Onset generally occurs between the ages of 40 and 70 years old and approximately 5,600 people are diagnosed in the U.S. each year.

ALS is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. Early symptoms include muscle weakness or stiffness, which progress in intensity and eventually cause a wasting and paralysis of muscles in the limbs and trunk. In the later stages of the disease, ALS affects the muscles that control speech, swallowing, and breathing. Some patients can become completely paralyzed.

Joseph Garza is not your typical ALS patient. He is just 14 years old and is currently the only child in Texas to be diagnosed with the disease. He lives in Brownsville with his mother and four siblings and is receiving treatment at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

Rodeo Dental and Orthodontics recently helped raise \$7,800 for Joseph and his family by pledging to donate \$100 for anyone who took part in the ALS ice bucket challenge. Everyone on the staff participated—even the dentists—and many people from the community came out to participate as well. Joseph's story is one that hits close to home for Rodeo Dental because we work with many children through our outreach programs. We admire his bravery and determination in the face of this debilitating disease.

"I'm going to fight, because I am a fighter." Joseph said. "And I will win. I am brave and I am strong. I will beat this."

A Sudden Limp

Joseph was a very normal kid when he suddenly developed a limp. At first the limp was just slight, but it quickly progressed to significant trouble walking and difficulty moving his arms. Doctors in Brownsville were puzzled; they ran numerous tests but were unable to find an explanation or diagnose him with anything. When Joseph's condition deteriorated rapidly over a period of just four months, his doctors decided to send him to Houston for additional testing.

It was then that the Lorrie, a single mother of five, received the devastating news that her son had ALS. Because the disease progresses differently with every patient, Joseph's progression is impossible to predict. But ALS has already robbed him of some of the things most of us take for granted—things like running and playing with friends or having a conversation with your brothers and sisters.

Today Joseph is confined to a wheelchair. He can't feed himself, he has trouble breathing, and he recently underwent a tracheotomy that has robbed him of his voice. But Joseph is a very brave young man and maintains a fierce determination to fight against this disease and to survive it. And the entire Brownsville community is standing behind him and his family.

Living with ALS

The life expectancy of an ALS patient averages two to five years from the time of diagnosis. More than half of all patients live more than three years, and many patients live for five years or more.

But the good news is that long-term survival is not out of reach, so there are many reasons for patients like Joseph to have hope. Up to 10 percent of patients survive for more than 10 years, and five percent survive for 20 years. In fact, in a small number of people, ALS stops progressing entirely and in some cases the symptoms actually reverse.

There are a number of treatments available for ALS that can help manage symptoms and prolong survival. One FDA-approved drug called Riluzole has been shown to moderately slow the progression of the disease and to prolong a better quality of life. There are also a number of additional drugs in clinical trials that show promise for helping ALS patients.

The Financial Impact of ALS

Patients with ALS incur significant costs for medical care, equipment, and home caregiving, especially in the later stages of the disease. Patients like Joseph struggle with the financial burden they must endure in order to utilize the therapies and drugs that can improve and prolong their lives.

There is evidence that people with ALS are living longer today thanks to the available treatments and other drugs that are under investigation. But these treatments are expensive, and the reality is that the \$7,800 Rodeo Dental raised through the ice bucket challenge meets only a fraction of this family's financial needs. And their costs will only increase over time as the disease progresses.

Joseph and his family face every day with an incredible amount of courage and a fierce determination to keep hope alive. If you'd like to make a secure donation to help Joseph in his fight, please visit <http://www.gofundme.com/clkx0>. All funds will be used to help pay for travel and accommodations, medical bills related to care, and other expenses incurred by the family during this time.

Rodeo Cares

Part of our mission at Rodeo Dental and Orthodontics is to positively impact our communities through educational programs and helping people in need. When we heard about Joseph and his family, we discussed whether or not we had the means to do something that would make a difference. It turned out that we could. The ice bucket challenge was just one example of our outreach work, and it reflects the spirit of Rodeo Dental's dedicated team of professionals.