

A Survivor's Story

My name is Christine Lentz. I am a mother of 3 teenage boys which I share with my husband in Colorado. I became a below knee/below elbow quad-amputee in January 2014 due to sepsis and toxic shock. The doctors did not think I would survive the infections; they gave me only a 5% chance of survival. I went through about twenty surgeries and 7 months in the hospital before I was able to return home.

On November 19, 2013 I had a routine, successful abdominal surgery with an estimated 4-week recovery time. During my recovery, I began having atypical complications, however, they did not appear to be overly concerning. I returned to my surgeon several times to examine these complications, only to be told that it was nothing to worry about and that they were not out of the ordinary.

Just before Christmas on December 27th, feeling very ill, I went back to my surgeon. I had a high fever and he advised me to go to the emergency room.

When I entered the ER, they drew blood. The ER doctor did an examination and determined, like all the other patients in the ER that night, I had the flu. During the examination, I explained the details of my surgery and the complications I had been experiencing for 7 weeks post-op, but this information did not seem to be taken into consideration. I insisted on a Flu test to confirm the ER doctor's diagnosis, which did come back positive. Unfortunately, this Flu diagnosis masked the other condition I had at this time, which was Sepsis. A more diligent review of my history should have resulted in the doctor testing my blood, which would have revealed the second condition I had, Sepsis.

I left the ER with a packet on how to care for the Flu, not knowing my body was Septic. Over the next three days, thinking I was recovering from the flu, I was actually going into Septic Shock.

Early on December 31st, suffering from unbearable leg pain, my husband took me to the ER for the second time. This time, however they drew blood and tested it, and it showed significant bacterial growth. I was admitted to the hospital for further evaluation. During this evaluation period, my blood pressure dropped and heart rate raised dramatically. I was rushed to the ICU and put on life support.

For the next 16 days, the doctors in the ICU worked diligently to save my life. It was determined I was in Septic Shock from a Strep-A bacterial blood infection and diagnosed with Toxic Shock Syndrome. The doctors used two very aggressive medications called Presser drugs, which draw blood from the extremities into my core to save my major organs and to keep me alive. Unfortunately, the result of using these drugs for a prolonged period of time is necrosis of the extremities.

Christine's story continues on the reverse side...

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On January 17th, I was transferred to Presbyterian/St. Luke hospital on the advice of the Infectious Disease specialist for more comprehensive care. Within several days of being in the ICU at PSL, my family was informed both hands and both feet needed to be amputated. Although I was mostly conscious during this time, I was, in fact, unaware of what was happening.

The amputation surgeries were completed and I was transferred to an Acute Care Hospital on February 3rd. This would be my recovery site for the next 5 months.

During the first 3 months at the Acute Care Hospital, I was not very coherent due to the pain and medications I was taking. I couldn't eat or drink anything for weeks. My protein levels were dangerously low and my weight dropped down to 70 pounds. I also lost all of my hair. My husband scaled back at work, with the support of his boss, to be by my side during late afternoons and evenings for much of my recovery. My parents moved to a nearby hotel so they could remain with me constantly for the first month. I was extremely lucky to have so much support. I was in the hospital for 7 months, and was rarely without family by my bedside. I emphasize this, because I believe this was key to my successful recovery.

I was transferred to a Rehabilitation Hospital for the final 6 weeks of my recovery, where I learned to use my prosthetics and perform the activities of daily living.

Finally, on August 1, 2014, I returned home.

I am very grateful to PS/L, their staff, and to all the healthcare providers who took care of me over the eight months I was in the hospital. They saved my life.

I am here today to promote the word SEPSIS. Fifty percent of the general public has never heard of the word. Had I known the word and the symptoms, I would have sought care much earlier by asking my doctors, "Do I have sepsis?". Patients and healthcare providers must work together if we are going to successfully fight sepsis.