

# Patient Profile of

# Anna Poszmik

BY ANNALISE DE JESUS

In May of 2015 at her home in Mount Laurel, NJ, Anna Poszmik, just 23 at the time, suffered from a severe asthma attack that led to cardiac arrest. Anna was pursuing her degree in neuroscience at Columbia University. She had been diagnosed with asthma at the age of 22 and began suffering from major attacks that often landed her in the hospital during the early months of 2015.

She had decided to come home for the weekend before she was due to take her last final exam when she suffered another attack that left her barely able to breathe or speak. Before the ambulance could arrive, Anna's breathing had stopped and she went into a cardiac arrest. Her mother, Annamaria Fulep, frantically tried to resuscitate her but there was little she could do.

"It was the worst hour of my life and the worst moment having my child down on the floor blue, and not having any idea what to do," said Fulep.

When the paramedics arrived, they successfully resuscitated her and took her to a local hospital. She was then placed on a therapeutic hypothermia protocol

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for neuroprotection. Five days later, she was transferred to Thomas Jefferson University Hospital's ICU for tertiary care. Her condition was complicated by long-lasting, uncontrollable seizures and doctors initially thought that Poszmik might never regain meaningful consciousness. "I'll never forget being told that the part of my daughter's brain that makes us human is dead," said Fulep.

Devastated by the poor prognosis at the time, Fulep tried to remain patient as more testing was performed. Over the course of the next two weeks, the results came back and a meeting was set up with the attending physician of neurological ICU at the time, Rodney Bell, MD, Lynne and Harold Honickman Professor of Neurology & Neurosurgery, and other members of the department to discuss Anna's prognosis.

"I remember driving there after cancelling class. It was so stressful not knowing what would happen," said Fulep. After a thorough discussion, the neuro-ICU team decided to pursue aggressive care. Life support was continued and her seizures were aggressively managed.

Anna stayed in the ICU for seven weeks and showed gradual improvement in her level of consciousness. She also began to undergo initial physical therapy. After noticeable improvement, Anna was sent to an acute rehabilitation facility to join a six-week program.

Anna is now alert with a remarkable improvement in her neurological status. She has no apparent speech difficulty and is able to walk with assistance. After a drastic recovery, Anna has been able to finish her last exam and complete her degree at Columbia University.