

Local doctor sees patients with rare bone disease taking part in marathon

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Updated: 8:08 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 5, 2010

Posted: 1:15 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 5, 2010

Isabela Alomar ran a mile of Sunday's Palm Beaches Marathon and walked about two more miles.

It wasn't an extraordinary feat in normal circumstances, but the 6-year-old had her mother in tears after she finished.

"I told her she could have a horsey-back ride on mommy's back, but she said, 'No, I can do it,'" said Margred Alomar.

Isabela has a rare bone disease called Melorheostosis, which causes her bones to grow improperly; Margred Alomar said her daughter's right heel went into her ankle, forcing her to walk on her toes.

But Isabela was running and walking normally Sunday thanks to Dror Paley, an orthopedist and founder of the Paley Advanced Limb Lengthening Institute at St. Mary's Medical Center.

Paley is an expert in limb-lengthening; he uses specialized surgeries and equipment to lengthen bones, using the body's own healing powers.

"It was so refreshing to find him and hear the confidence that he could work with my daughter," said Margred Alomar, who, with her husband Sandy, an ex-Major League Baseball player, discovered Paley through the Internet.

On Sunday, the Alomars and other patients of Paley from around the country and the world came to the Palm Beaches Marathon to thank Paley and raise money for his foundation.

About 30 of Paley's patients and their families walked, wheeled or ran the first 3.2 miles of the marathon to raise funds for the Paley Save-a-Limb Foundation, which educates doctors and the public about options to avoid limb amputations and pays for Paley to go on mission trips to help children and adults with limb deformities.

"Prior to a lot of the operations I developed, the only way to treat was to amputate part of the limb and put on a prosthesis," said Paley, adding that the marathon was the foundation's first major fund-raising event.

"For these children, the 3.2 miles is a marathon, a huge distance," Paley said. "That distance is a true obstacle."

"Seeing everyone, all of Dr. Paley's other patients, it brings back everything so strong," said Margred, who lives in Chicago but travels with her husband to West Palm Beach to get treatment for Isabela. "It's great to know all these kids will be able to walk like Isabela next year because of him."

Grant Dewey, 15, is another patient of Paley's. He and his family moved to Palm Beach from California in August in order to be closer to Paley.

Grant has a form of spina bifida that has caused him to lose feeling in his right leg. "I kept breaking it because I couldn't feel it, so my growth plates shut down," Grant said. As a result, his right leg is shorter than his left.

But Paley is trying to fix that, and Grant said he expects his legs to be the same length again in six months. He was excited to participate in the marathon to "show people that it's not the disability, it's the ability," he said.

While Grant was pushed in his wheelchair for most of the race, he stopped and got out and walked the last half mile, using crutches and displaying the lengthening device on his leg.

"Grant really hasn't been able to walk almost a year," said his mother, Rebecca Dewey. "For him to get out of the wheelchair and walk for the last half mile, that's an accomplishment for him."

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