

Family gets Christmas wish as miracle girl Nicole walks again

By Patricia McDonagh
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THEY said she would never be able to walk again. But yesterday brave Nicole Cahill proved the medical experts wrong.

After six months of intensive treatment in the US, the 10-year-old took a tentative few steps on Irish soil -- her first for more than four years.

The youngster, from Marshalstown, outside Enniscorthy, Co Wexford, was left wheelchair-bound following a mystery viral illness which took hold in 2004.

The infection caused the then six-year-old to suffer from inflammation of the brain and a stroke. Her family watched in horror as the "sturdiest" of their three children lapsed into a coma for more than 24 days.

Doctors said if she ever woke up, she would probably be in a vegetative state for the rest of her life.

But she did wake up and, after 12 months in hospital and the National Rehabilitation Centre in Dun Laoghaire, she was able to return home.

In a bid to give her a better quality of life, her father Bill and mother Mairead arranged for her to have treatment at the Beth Israel Medical Centre in Manhattan, New York.

Surgeons conducted a life-changing operation on July 1 and this was followed by six months of rehabilitation.

Yesterday, her mum and dad, sister Deborah (14) and brother William(8) got the Christmas present they had all been wishing for.

For her father, seeing her walk out of Dublin Airport was something he will treasure all his life. "What happened to us shows that nothing is impossible. You have to keep the faith," he told the Irish Independent. "You have to keep fighting for what you need and not feel defeated. Giving up never came into my head when this was going on. I have great faith in god."

The treatment has cost the family in excess of €200,000 so far, much of which was paid for by money raised by well-wishers in Wexford.





The family were forced to try and sell their home to fund the treatment, but couldn't because of the crumbling property market. And the costs are set to continue as Nicole will need intense physiotherapy for the next few years.

Splints

She will use a device called a Nada chair, which is equipped with splints to stretch her muscles.

At school -- which she begins again next week -- she will use a walker and helmet for her support and safety. Yesterday, she said she was delighted to be home.

"I am really looking forward to waking up and seeing my family on Christmas morning," she said. Her father is hoping she will be able to get treatment at Berry Sports Medicine and Physiotherapy Clinic in Adamstown. He is also hoping she will receive help from the HSE for the cost of her physiotherapy.

The HSE, he claims, also needs to put more money into the health service to provide better facilities.

However, a HSE spokeswoman last night said they had not had a discharge report to determine what can be provided within the resources available.

- Patricia McDonagh