

Wexford girl walks again after treatment in New York

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A CO WEXFORD girl who was told she would never walk again took her first steps on home soil yesterday morning after six months of rehabilitation in New York.

Cheers and tears greeted Nicole Cahill (10), Marshalstown near Enniscorthy, as she walked unaided through the arrivals area at Dublin airport yesterday.

Her father Bill Cahill said it was "unbelievable and fabulous" to see his daughter walking again and would make for a memorable Christmas both for Nicole and his family.



"She's on a high," he said. "The whole country needs a bit of good news at the moment. We're all going to have a great Christmas after this."

Four years ago, Nicole contracted a debilitating disease acute disseminating encephalomyelitis (inflammation of the brain) which left her in a coma for 24 days. When she emerged from the coma, she and her family were warned she would be extremely brain-damaged.

She remained in a wheelchair despite months of treatment at the National Rehabilitation Centre in Dún Laoghaire. Her aunt Breda Cahill in New York recommended further treatment at a clinic in New York.

Nicole received surgery and rehabilitation at the Beth Israel Medical Centre in New York City under the care of renowned orthopaedic surgeon Dr Jacob Rozbruch.

The treatment will cost at least €200,000 and the family have to date raised €120,000. She will also need private physiotherapy treatment four times a week. A CD of songs by local Wexford artists Ron Smith, Stephen Murphy and Blue Lace called A Song for Nicole has just been launched to raise funds to cover the costs of her treatment.

"By the time the final bill comes from America, we expect it will be at least a couple of hundred thousand at least," said Mr Cahill. Mr Cahill was critical of the fact that his daughter had to go to the US to get the treatment she needed. "There are going to be serious cuts in health next year. Surely there are a thousand different things that could be cut other than health. Nothing is more important than health."

A large party was held for Nicole at her aunt's house in Marshalstown yesterday followed by a reception at a hotel in Riverside Park Hotel in Enniscorthy.