

The Cross of Love and Forgiveness

This is the story behind the cross that hangs outside the Physician's entrance at HSHS St. Vincent Hospital. It is being shared upon the request of Laura Nowakowski's family.

Laura Lynn Nowakowski was a miracle. She went to bed on the evening of Dec. 23, 2009 living the beautiful American dream – a middle class life with a husband who adored her, two beautiful children who loved her and an extended family she loved to see and be there for at any opportunity. She was a teacher in the Howard-Suamico school district and a Sunday school teacher at her church. She was very active in the community as PTO president and loved to help people.

On Dec, 23, 2009, she suffered sudden cardiac death while she slept. Her husband discovered her dead in their bed the morning of Dec. 24, 2009. Dispatchers guided him through CPR and emergency responders rushed Laura to HSHS St. Mary's Hospital Medical Center. After approximately a minimum of 20 minutes without a heartbeat, her heartbeat was restored in the ambulance and she was placed in a medically-induced coma to lower her temperature and preserve whatever functioning she had. Multiple doctors at St. Mary's told the family not to expect Laura to survive. However, God had a different plan. Laura came out of the coma on her own around 7 a.m. on Christmas Day, and eventually was given a pacemaker to monitor her heart.

In Feb. 2013, after completing rehab programs and learning how to live life again without fear, Laura and her husband woke up to Laura's pacemaker alarming. They went to St. Mary's hospital where they learned her pacemaker wire had failed. The doctors recommended a laser-assisted pacemaker wire replacement. To do this procedure as safely as possible, the family was told Laura would need to be transferred to St. Vincent. The family was told the procedure was very low risk (less than 1.5%).

Sadly, Laura did not survive the procedure. HSHS-EWD and Prevea have done a lot of soul searching on how we could have better cared for Laura so that she would have been able to return to her family and the community she loved and served. We examine every experience which isn't a successful outcome or positive experience and ask what we can learn to improve. We have an incredibly



important role in safety, quality and experience to each patient.

HSHS –EWD and Prevea leaders have met with the family, and they continue to seek peace in their lives following Laura's death. Laura's mother requested a cross be placed at the physician entrance as a reminder of the sacred work each of us does every day, and the lives that are entrusted to us. May this cross of love and forgiveness be a reminder that a beautiful person died at our facility, and of the importance of following safe protocols, questioning procedures and never being afraid to speak up.

Laura's family would like to share the following message with you as we reveal and embody Christ's healing love for all people through our high

quality Franciscan health care ministry:

Let us always remember that Christ delivered God's promise of the Gospel truth; God Himself provided a Savior to the world to save us from our sinful nature. God's incredible, unmeasurable amount of forgiveness set such a beautiful, amazing example in the hearts of Laura's family so much so that they have been able to share their forgiveness with us. Like Laura's family, may we choose to live Christ's love and forgiveness and hold Laura's family in prayer as they hold us in prayer. Laura's family hopes one day to be able to help others through the difficult situation their family has had to endure. Remember then when we enter this sacred space of health care and see this cross of Love and Forgiveness may we be reminded of the gift Laura has been to her family and community; the gift Laura's family has been to HSHS and the lives they will touch in the future as they share Laura's story and the Gospel message. May we always practice the art of providing safe health care to those who entrust their lives to us. And as we practice the healing ministry of Christ may the gift of God's kept promise of a Savior to the world whose demonstrated love and undeserved forgiveness remain at the center of our practice so that each patient, every time may experience God's love and forgiveness.