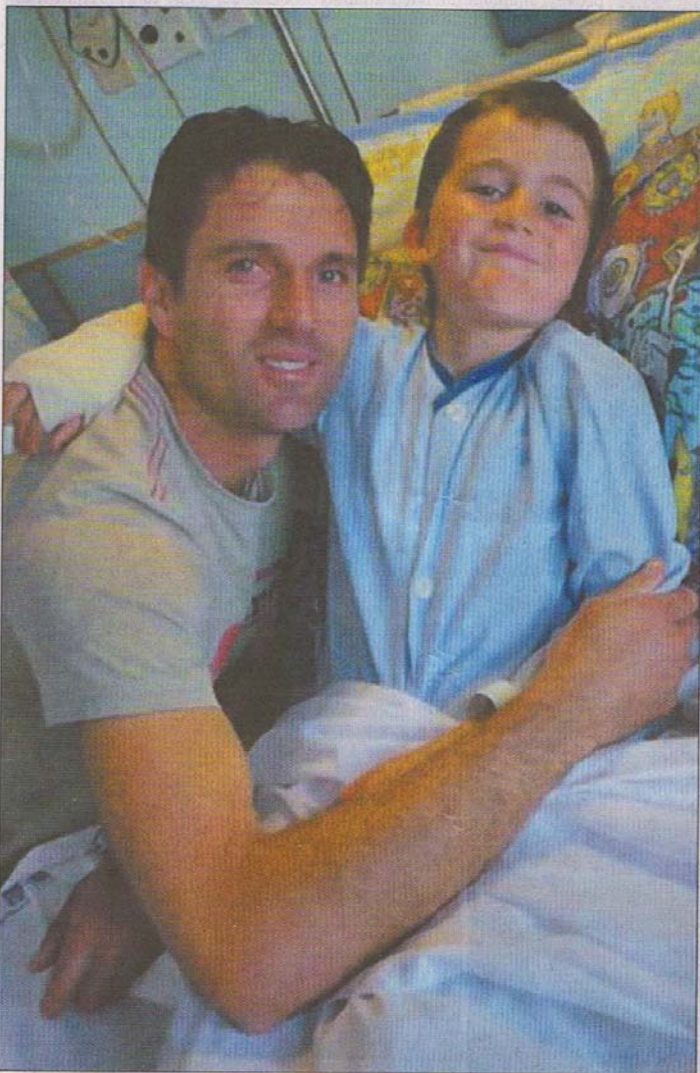


Cancer no match for Rory's bravery and fighting spirit



CATCH UP: Sean and Rory Gardiner get in some dad-and-son time at Auckland's Starship Hospital. PICTURE / SUPPLIED

by Annette Lambly

A plucky 7-year-old boy is fighting an unexpected battle of a lifetime against a deadly and aggressive cancer. While a hoped-for visit home to Waihue, near Dargaville, this weekend has not happened, Rory continues to make progress through what can only be described as every parent's nightmare.

On March 20, only a week off his birthday, Rory Gardiner lay in Auckland's Starship hospital recovering from a six-hour long surgery to remove a 4cm by 4.5cm tumour from the base of his brain.

Following the operation, Rory's parents Belga Honnor and Sean Gardiner, learned how close they had come to losing their son. Rory's tumour had been caused by a grade four Medulla blastoma, a particularly malignant type of cancer.

"The neurosurgeon said he had been on a razor's edge, another two weeks and we would have lost him," said Ms Honnor.

However, Rory was not out of the woods: a second tumour on his hypothalamus was also found and another six-hour operation was performed on April 7. Because of the tricky location, the surgeons could only remove most of the tumour and hope radiotherapy and chemotherapy would kill the remaining area.

Last week Rory had been able to go for day trips to the park and had been enjoying staying at McDonald House and making visits to the hospital only for treatment.

His mother Leigh has taken time off work from Whangarei District Council to be with Rory. Dad Sean tries to keep the money coming in while taking care of older brother Sam and helping out with Rory

He [Rory] had been on a razor's edge, another two weeks and we would have lost him.

as often as possible.

The family was unable to make the visit home on the weekend because Rory's temperature continued to fluctuate. On Monday, Ms Honnor said the "spiking" had continued to baffle the doctors.

"His temperature has been up to 38.5C, sometimes twice a day, yet all the blood samples show no sign of infection. He gets stronger and happier in himself every day but the doctors are concerned about infection," she said.

On Sunday the doctors took a sample of cerebral spinal fluid, but the results were not yet known.

Rory's illness has been sudden. In February the normally fit, healthy and active little boy had started getting headaches out of the blue, some serious enough to cause vomiting. On March 17, a CT scan detected the brain tumour and Rory was admitted to hospital the same day.

Ms Honnor said: "Rory has been brave, patient, tolerant and hung in there through scans, intravenous lines, a drug regime, surgery and

blood tests." The first operation had affected his movement on the left side, and his eyes were not working in tandem, although both were likely to improve with physiotherapy. Follow-up treatments would include radiotherapy (six to eight weeks) and chemotherapy (eight to 12 months) until he is a little over 8 years old.

The treatments would result in hair loss, nausea, fatigue and a reduced ability to fight viruses and infection. "But there is a good chance of full recovery and we are very proud of the way he is handling it. We have no choice other than to accept what is happening," said Ms Honnor.

On Sunday Rory had a visit from his best mate Kody Johnston. It was the first time Rory had had his own visitor outside family. "The two boys were so happy to see each other and were inseparable during the visit. Rory has missed the company of his friends, and I have noticed him losing confidence and withdrawing, and it was wonderful to see him happy," said Mum.

The family wished to thank everyone for the love, support, and generosity they had received. "We are overwhelmed, humbled and grateful. You are all helping us in the fight."

Granddad's smoked eel and Kody's mum Trudi's pumpkin soup had cheered Rory greatly over the last few days.

A website has been sent up so that people can follow Rory's progress and send messages of support. "They [the messages] hold us up when we hit the wall".

Anyone wishing to make a financial donation to help the family can also do so through the website, www.rorygardiner.co.nz