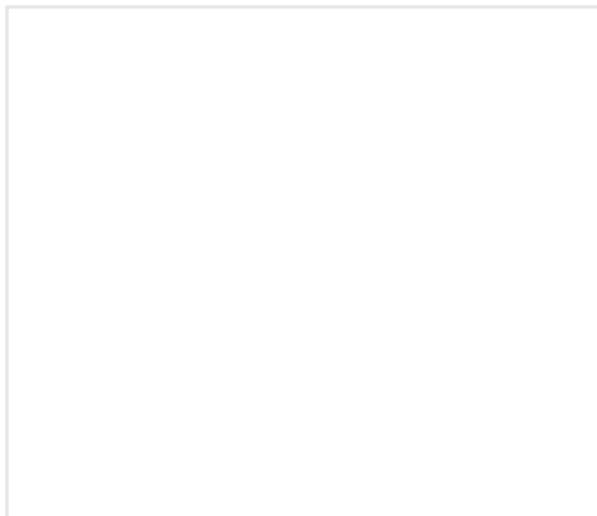


CHICAGO, IL – A Jamestown woman underwent a process to harvest her stem cells on Wednesday, in hopes that they can be used to cure her multiple sclerosis.

We [first told you about Nicole Johnson back in June](#), as she struggled not only with MS, but also with her insurance company, Univera Health, which was refusing to approve the treatment she sought by Dr. Richard Burt of Northwestern University Hospital.



Burt's pioneering therapy has shown great success in treating MS and other autoimmune diseases. However, not long after our story aired, Nicole got a call from Univera which said they would approve her for treatment.

"I kind of put my hands on my head and started crying because it's a lot of emotion when you fight for something for so long and you finally get the answers you want. You're kind of just overwhelmed," Johnson told WGRZ-TV. "Maybe it was the help from you guys, maybe it was the public...the story was shared on Facebook 2,000 times, so I'm not sure. But they (Univera) changed their minds, and I'm very thankful for that."

Citing privacy laws Univera Health will not discuss Nicole's case, or even confirm she is a customer.

Her church and others have helped her raise the approximately \$40,000 she will still have to provide in co-pays and other expenses.

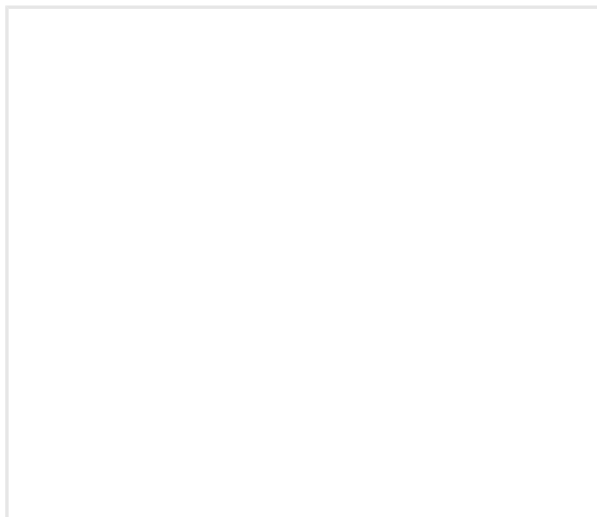
The treatment will not be easy.

Nicole must undergo intensive chemotherapy after her stem cells are harvested.

"It is a lot of chemotherapy, but because MS is an auto immune disease, it wants to wipe out your immune cells because they don't have a memory and then start fresh," she explained.

Following an initial round of chemotherapy, the stem cells are harvested.

"Then they clean them and freeze them and take out what they don't want, then I rest about three weeks still in the Chicago area," she said. "Then on December 1st I will be admitted to the hospital for five more days of chemo. That's to kill my immune system down to nothing so I'm in reverse isolation," she said, describing the process of being encapsulated in a bubble for 3-5 days as a means of preventing her from being contaminated by other people or objects. During this time, her body will have virtually no means of fighting off disease or infection.



"Then they give you your stem cells back, they call that your birthday...they even have a cake for you!" Nicole's "birthday", is scheduled to occur around December 10th.

"My life is going to change," she said. "I'm gonna be back to my old self and that's very emotional ...just being back to being me, baking and doing things for others."

She will not be allowed to leave the hospital until her immune system rebuilds to a sufficient level. However, if all goes well, she expects to be home in time for Christmas.

"I have a plaque on my desk and it says, 'I practice courage every day'. Courage is -- even if you're scared --you keep going and I'm scared but I'm going to keep going," she said.

"There was a lot of times that I wanted to give up and people kept encouraging me to keep going, so I am happy with myself that I listened and kept fighting for what I needed."

