

Race is on for meningitis B vaccine

Students these days are required to get vaccinated for meningitis, that scary disease that occasionally breaks out on college campuses. But while there is a vaccine for four strains, there is no vaccine for meningitis B.

Cindy Payne and her sisters hope to change that, and they have been doing fundraisers in memory of Payne's only child, Jennifer Wells, who died of meningococcal meningitis (group-B) in 2006.

There are two upcoming events to raise money to stop this deadly strain. One is a benefit concert on June 12 at the new location of Club 216.

The concert features four local musicians, including Kate Hanson — the daughter of family friend and organizer Mary Pat Hanson — as well as Andre Hakes, Ralph Rush and Burnley Station.

Wells, a Charlottesville native, was a student in her fourth year at the University of Virginia. She

Gatherings

Anne Causey



had been living at home and working a part-time job. She had told her mother on a Thursday night that she didn't feel well, and the next morning complained of a headache and said she wasn't going to school or work that day.

When Payne arrived home after work Friday, her daughter was lying on her bedroom floor. All day Saturday she was on life support in the hospital, and Sunday — Sept. 10 — Payne had to decide to take her off life support because she was brain dead.

"The doctors said that even if we had taken her to the hospital [when she first

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complained of feeling sick], they would have probably told us to take her home," Payne said.

Apparently, the flu like symptoms (fever, headache) often are mistaken for those of the less threatening illness, though Payne points out that doctors are now more careful.

"When it goes to your spine, it hits your brain within seconds," Payne said. "They told me she didn't suffer. That [suffering] I couldn't have stood."

Wells was the first student at UVa in 10 years to have Strain B — and the first fatality.

Since her daughter's death, Payne and her four sisters have organized the Moonlight Walk/Run at Monticello High School. The two-mile race takes place at 8 p.m. Saturday, and it usu-

ally attracts more than 200 participants. Payne said they've been able to raise about \$15,000 a year with the walk and other fundraisers.

The cool thing is that the money they raise goes to the Children's Hospital and Research Institute at Oakland, Calif.

After Wells died, her mother found, with the help of a doctor at UVa, researchers who were working to develop a vaccine for this strain of meningitis. She found Dr. Gregory Moe at the Oakland hospital. His work was so successful that he also had received a four-year grant.

"People know you have to get the vaccine," Payne said. "They need to know that there is not a vaccine for this strain. Before [Jennifer] got sick, I didn't know there was a strain."

Payne said she knows the economy has made it more difficult to raise funds, but she hopes to see from 200 to 300 people at the concert. She also said she gets nerv-

ous before each fundraising event.

"I have to do this kind of thing. I do them for her," Payne said. "I get nervous about them. If they don't do well, I feel like I let her down. I try really hard to make it a really big success."

The concert is from 7 to 9 p.m. Club 216 is now at 609 E. Market St. The cost for the concert is \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door.

The cost for the Moonlight Walk/Run is \$15 in advance, \$10 for children 10 and younger. The cost increases to \$20 for adults and \$15 for children after today.

You can find out more about both events and about Wells by going to the Web site at www.moonlight4meningitis.com. There is information about the Moonlight Walk/Run at Ragged Mountain Running Shop and information about both events at A Cut Above and More on Rio Road.

You also can call 989-2162.