

FACES OF AMR PROFILE STORIES



Patti Wukovits

“Within hours of Kimberly’s first symptoms, her heart and kidneys were failing, and she was in septic shock, a life-threatening complication from an infection.”

As a registered nurse, Patti Wukovits gets frustrated when she hears of parents who don’t want to get their children vaccinated. As a mother, it is especially difficult because she knows that if a vaccine for Meningitis B had been available in 2012, her daughter, Kimberly Coffey, would be alive today.

Kimberly was a healthy high school senior when she came home from school one afternoon complaining of body aches and a fever of 101, common flu-like symptoms. The next morning, she felt worse and complained that her entire body hurt, including telling her mom that her ankles felt like they were bleeding. Patti saw a few tiny purple dots and immediately knew it was very serious.

Kimberly was rushed to the emergency room where a doctor suspected Kimberly had bacterial meningitis and that the bacteria had infected her blood. Patti was stunned because her children were up to date on all of their vaccines. She later learned that the meningococcal vaccine Kimberly had received (MenACWY) did not protect her against meningitis B. Also, at that time in 2012, there wasn’t a meningitis B vaccine available in the U.S. Meningococcal bacteria are spread from person to person through direct, close contact with a person’s oral secretions.

Within hours of Kimberly’s first symptoms, her heart and kidneys were failing, and she was in septic shock. Kimberly had been given IV antibiotics to treat the infection, but at this point she was also facing additional hurdles. As the days stretched on, it was determined that she had impending brain herniation and further testing declared her to be brain-dead.

Patti made the ultimate difficult decision to remove her 17-year-old daughter from life support. Today, Patti wants to make sure that no other parent has to face the same decision because of Meningitis B. She has committed herself to telling Kimberly’s story through the [Kimberly Coffey Foundation](#) and educating others about signs, symptoms and treatment of Meningitis B and, especially, the vaccine for Meningitis B, which became available in 2014 – two years after Kimberly died.

Patti, who works as an oncology nurse, also emphasizes how serious sepsis is. She wants families to understand that it’s a life-threatening medical emergency, especially if it becomes impossible to treat with currently available antibiotics. It’s continuous education – and innovation – that’s needed to raise awareness about the significance and value of vaccines and antibiotics to help others in the future.

