

FACES OF AMR PROFILE STORIES



Ella Balasa

“COVID-19 has forced the world to talk in cystic fibrosis terms. The difficulty and uncertainty about the risk of infections are constant.”

Ella is a writer, patient advocate, and scientist with cystic fibrosis. She was diagnosed with CF at 18 months old. Carrying a lifelong risk of infections, cystic fibrosis is a chronic disease that impacts multiple organs, primarily the lungs, GI tract and sinuses. A build up of mucus in the lungs attracts bacteria which colonizes and causes the body to continuously fight infections as the immune system erodes impacted organs which then eventually lose function.

Ella spent weeks in the hospital at a time as a child and into adulthood, and because of her determination to carry on an active, fulfilling lifestyle, despite her CF, she has cycled through oral and intravenous antibiotics consistently throughout her life. But nothing could have prepared her and her family for 2018.

At age 25, after catching RSV, oral and inhaled antibiotics became ineffective for Ella. She was hospitalized five times with infections requiring intravenous antibiotics. She also experienced three lung collapses requiring surgery. Ella needed supplemental oxygen 24/7 was “living” with only 18 percent lung function.

Ella had realized her infections were becoming harder to treat, more frequent, and more severe. This frequency and severity of infections got Ella thinking about the instability of her health and what her alternatives might be. It was scary and not absent of risk, but with a combination of therapies, Ella has found some equilibrium in her healthcare.

What Ella knows all too well now is that there needs to be an emphasis on innovation for antibiotics beyond the traditional approaches to reduce future resistance. She knows that we absolutely cannot be content letting the healthcare demands of future generations rely on existing therapies. Ella fears that the realities of AMR will be far worse after the COVID-19 pandemic is past us. New antibiotic therapies are desperately needed now, and not just for those who have chronic conditions. Antibiotic resistance can happen to anyone, it does not discriminate.

