

# FACES OF AMR PROFILE STORIES

## Gunnar Esiason



*“I have seen how antibiotic resistance is quietly becoming one of the greatest threats to humanity in our time. If my life has taught me anything, it is that we have the power to conquer antibiotic-resistance, just as we have turned around the course of cystic fibrosis forever.”*

As a former hockey player – and the son of a professional athlete – Gunnar Esiason knows about tracking stats and playing the odds. As someone who was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis, Esiason has also known that the odds are stacked against him. Around the time he was diagnosed as a two-year-old, the lifespan of someone with cystic fibrosis was about 30 years.

Despite the odds, fast forward to today and Esiason is 32 years old, married and a dad. But it was not easy getting here, and there’s still a long way to go to help him and others like him.

Cystic fibrosis is a chronic disease that impacts multiple organs and carries a lifelong risk of infections. Mucus builds up in the lungs, clogging airways and trapping bacteria, which can lead to infections, inflammation and other complications, including developing antibiotic-resistant bacteria in the lungs. Infections come with fever, increased cough, aches, pains, fatigue, shortness of breath and, over time, a steady loss of lung function.

The reality of living with cystic fibrosis (CF) became much worse once Esiason graduated from college. That’s when the disease progressed faster than he and his family could have imagined. While his friends were getting jobs and moving into their new apartments, Esiason was frequently hospitalized because of infections and worsening symptoms.

He and his family committed to doing everything possible to give him the best odds at survival.

Over a five-year period, he endured nearly two dozen medical procedures and required approximately a cumulative year’s worth of time on intravenous antibiotic therapy to treat the frequent infections that develop in a CF patient’s lungs. Unfortunately, the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria adds to the complications faced by CF patients, which is what happened to Esiason.

As time went on, he lost the ability to use one antibiotic after the next. And while the threat of antibiotic resistance is still very real today, fortunately, for Esiason, science and innovation provided the miracle – the proverbial Hail Mary – that he needed at the time he needed it. At 28 years old, he participated in a clinical trial for a now FDA-approved drug. It was this drug that gave Esiason hope and possibility. The same hope and possibility that he sees for the development of new antibiotics.

There is not a cure for cystic fibrosis and the threat of infections looms daily. That is part of the reason that Esiason has turned his struggles, experience and knowledge into advocating for himself and others. He sits on the board of the [Boomer Esiason Foundation](#), which raises money, awareness and support for the cystic fibrosis community, and recently received a master’s degree in public health. He frequently tells his story, and recently participated in a panel discussion on Capitol Hill about the urgent need to address antimicrobial resistance. By doing so, he hopes his story inspires action to support antibiotic innovation and curb the growing antibiotic resistance crisis.

