

Lu Sipos—Friend in Need: Chemo Duck

When Lu Sipos' 1-year-old son, Gabe, was diagnosed with rhabdomyosarcoma in 2002, he didn't understand the diagnosis or his treatment, which is why Sipos transformed a stuffed animal into Chemo Duck, complete with scrubs, a bandana, and chemotherapy port. The toy became not only a source of comfort for Gabe, but also a learning tool.



Lu Sipos created Chemo Duck as a learning tool for her son, Gabe (above), during his treatment.

"It was just so difficult with one so little to try to get him to understand what his treatment was about," Sipos says. "I thought it would be a great way to help him." Other parents at Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt—where Gabe was being treated—began asking her to make their children a Chemo Duck.

"At first, I didn't realize how powerful it was when I made it. After we received so many requests from other parents for a duck, we started to make them at home and give them to friends. And then it reached a point when the project was much bigger than we had originally anticipated."

Sipos created a nonprofit organization, Gabe's My Heart, and talked with administrators and staff at Children's Hospital to develop a program to offer the toy to children undergoing cancer treatment. And while the duck was created for young children, Sipos says they've received requests from adult cancer patients, either because the duck brings them joy or to educate their children about treatment.

The toy comes with either a central line or a port, and an arm immobilizer to teach the child not to pull the line or bandage and to keep the arm straight if there's a peripheral I.V. An educational book and DVD are also included.

The new goal of Gabe's My Heart, Sipos says, is to launch the program nationwide. And Chemo Duck has now become a three-pronged educational tool, which not only teaches the child and parents, but also educates the public on childhood cancer issues.

"We want to throw some light on [children's] stories and let people know that there are so many children living with the after-effects of cancer," she says. "We want to make sure the public knows that these children will spend the rest of their lives dealing with late effects.

"It's never over We just want to let everyone know how brave these kids really are."

For more on Chemo Duck, go to www.gabesmyheart.com.

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