A Q&A with Paula Barrett, Cystic Fibrosis Nurse Coordinator at the IWK

My name is Felicia Hunter, and I'm an 11-year-old IWK patient living with cystic fibrosis (CF). I wanted to help my friends at the IWK Foundation share more with you about CF. So, I interviewed Paula Barrett, my Cystic Fibrosis Nurse Coordinator at the IWK. Read on to learn more about CF, how it's treated and how a new medicine is changing lives for kids like me.

Felicia Hunter

Felicia: Paula, as you know, I was diagnosed with CF at 17 months old. Could you explain what CF is?

Paula: Sure, Felicia! CF, or cystic fibrosis, is a genetically inherited disease mainly affecting the lungs and digestive system. People with CF can have a persistent cough with thick, sticky mucus that can clog the lungs. CF can cause damage to a person's airway and shorten their life span. Unfortunately, there is not yet a cure.

Felicia: You're a Cystic Fibrosis Nurse Coordinator at the IWK's CF Clinic. Can you share a little bit about what happens in this clinic?

Paula: I'd love to! The IWK's CF Clinic provides multidisciplinary care for infants, children and youth with CF. Most people with CF are diagnosed at birth, so we teach families how to give their infant or child pancreatic enzyme supplements to help with their digestion. We also show them how to do aerosol therapy (medication that's inhaled) and chest physiotherapy and regularly have check-ups with patients like yourself to monitor their health.

Felicia: In October 2022, I began taking a new medication called Trikafta. How does this medication help people like me living with CF?

Paula: As you know, this new medication is changing CF as we know it. Trikafta is a prescription medicine that targets the underlying cause of CF for individuals—like you—with a specific CF gene mutation. It can help to normalize secretions and improve weight and lung function. Trikafta is such a game-changer for those living with CF. This news gives hope to those impacted by CF. Drug companies are working on other modulators to fix the function of the many different genes that cause CF.

Felicia: Thank you for sitting down with me today, Paula. I hope this helps IWK Foundation donors learn more about CF and how, by supporting the IWK, they make a difference to patients like me, who receive ongoing care.