

Nightmare journey ends in mental health recovery

"I would never hesitate to recommend inpatient mental health care at Regions," said Ann Settgast, the daughter of a former patient. "I just have utmost confidence in their ability to help. It was life altering for my family."

Mary Ellen Nolte, Ann's mother, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at the age of 38. Though she experienced a few manic episodes over the years, she lived a normal life as a math teacher until her retirement.

However, in March 2020, Mary Ellen developed a severe mania and became very ill. She was admitted to an inpatient geriatric psychiatry unit in her hometown of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Over the next couple of months, Mary Ellen's condition deteriorated, and Ann feared that her mother would not improve. This was devastating, considering that Mary Ellen experienced no abnormal symptoms at the beginning of March.

"I was desperate because there was no way to talk to her," Ann said.

As a HealthPartners physician, Ann believed there had to be another route. She spoke with colleagues and decided to transfer Mary Ellen to Regions Hospital for inpatient care.

Ann was there every day during Mary Ellen's two-month stay. "I was intimately involved with her doctors and her team. She got phenomenal care, and she got better. The difference at Regions was the assumption that she should get better and a recognition that the goal was to get her back to normal. I felt that commitment the whole time and it was very comforting. Everybody treated her beautifully."

Mary Ellen shared her reflections on the four-month episode. "It's unreal; I've lost a part of my life. I remember occupational therapy (I call it arts and crafts); it was the one time in my life I did something creative. I could focus and it was good to use my hands."



Ann Settgast and her mother, Mary Ellen Nolte

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Every staff member, no matter their role at the hospital, was extremely respectful, said Ann and Mary Ellen, who is particularly grateful to her psychiatrists, Dr. Mahesh Kumar and Dr. Scott Oakman. The two physicians tried several medication options and when none worked, she received electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) treatment. That was the treatment that brought her brain back to normal.

"Dr. Kumar was very encouraging, kind and caring," Mary Ellen said. "I appreciated that he took time to talk with me because it was during COVID when I felt very isolated."

Mary Ellen's family doctor in Indiana told her that this was a very severe episode and without her trip to Minnesota she would not be alive today. "Ann saved my life by moving me to Regions."