

[MUSIC BED STARTS]

[Doctor Ruemu Birhiray]: Somebody comes into the emergency room, and you get a phone call. And you're told that this 19 year old is in the emergency room. And they just had a seizure. And so you rush over there and see what the deal is after they've had the scan. And the scan shows that they have a brain tumor. You can imagine how traumatic that is for the family. And you can see your own children in that person. Of course at that point you do not have any diagnosis, so you can't initiate therapy. But you want to make sure they stabilize them, you know, make sure that their seizure's controlled. Because without controlling that seizure, that patient may be lost and patient may die right away. And then from that very dramatic presentation, you want to be able to establish a diagnosis. And that's what you do as quickly as you can. But there are so many parameters to taking care of that 19 year old that you have to navigate and navigate very quickly.

[MUSIC BED FADES OUT]

[MUSIC BED FADES IN]

[SFX 1]

[SFX 2]

FROM W-H-J-E, THIS IS FIRST RESPONDERS 411, GETTING YOU THE INSIDE SCOOP
ON FIRST RESPONDERS IN THE CARMEL AREA.

[SFX 3]

I'M TATUM PRATI

[MUSIC BED FADES OUT]

[SFX 4]

[Tatum]: There are three major types of doctors who take care of cancer. One of these is a medical oncologist. They administer chemotherapy or other medicines for the treatment of different cancers. Doctor Ruemu Birhiray is a medical oncologist.

[Doctor Birhiray]: Growing up as a youngster, I always wanted to be a physician. I wanted to be a doctor. Of course at that point, I didn't know what kind of doctor. And in training and going to medical school, I realized that I loved two aspects of medicine. I loved the biology, trying to understand why diseases happen and understanding the ways of how to block those pathways. The other thing that I really liked was dealing with psychological aspects of human illness. And during my residency, I realized that in oncology I could do both of those things. You know, apply biology to the treatment of disease and also take care of the psychological aspects of disease. That's where the interest started, and I've never regretted that.

[MUSIC BED FADES IN]

[Doctor Birhiray]: Oh yeah, there are times that it's rough. There are times you come home, and you're very sad. There are times I come home and tell the kids I just lost somebody that's very dear to me today, and I'm very sad. And you have to be in touch with the emotions. You don't have to say exactly what the circumstances are. But I think it's important that you are a human being throughout the process. Don't try to not feel what you feel. If it hurts, you know, let it hurt. And sometimes you have to attend funerals. Sometimes you have to visit with family afterwards.

[MUSIC BED FADES OUT]

[Maya Birhiray]: Sometimes it's kind of hard because my dad's job is kind of demanding of him. And it's not like a set, oh, "he works from eight to five" kind of job. It's a "he's gone in the morning and he comes back at night" kind of thing.

[Tatum]: This is Maya Birhiray, Doctor Birhiray's daughter.

[Maya]: So sometimes it's kind of hard because he has meetings. Like sometimes he won't be there for my birthday or something like that. He really tries to avoid those situations, but sometimes they're unavoidable. So it's really difficult sometimes when he can't be at certain events and such.

[MUSIC BED FADES IN]

[Maya]: But I know that he really tries and that some people just kind of need him more in that moment than I do. And that I get to see him all the time and that I'm lucky that he gets to change people's lives like he does. My dad's, he's pretty inspiring. He kind of has shown me that I also want to go into the medical field.

[MUSIC BED FADES OUT]

[Doctor Birhiray]: There is a young man that I have remained in touch with. I took care of his mother many years ago now. He lives in Ohio. And when his mom passed, he was still in high school. And now he lives with his aunt who's raising him. And he's a star basketball player for his high school. And I make it my business every Christmas to be in touch with him. It's a personal promise I made to myself. And there's another young lady whose mom I took care of when she was in kindergarten. And now she's in college. And she's always brought me her grades every year to look at, and she wants to become a doctor. And even now that she's in college, she brings me her grades. And I tell my kids that's my adopted daughter.

[MUSIC BED FADES IN]

[Maya]: It was Christmas morning. We left at three a.m.. And I took a whole bunch of bouquets. And I took different ones. And I think he had to do, he was on call that Christmas, so we had to go into the hospital. And we went to different rooms, and I took flowers to all of the patients and wished them a Merry Christmas 'cause I know that spending Christmas at the hospital probably

is not where they want to be. They want to be with their families. So I just kinda wanted to brighten up their holiday. It was really cool seeing the smiles on their faces and getting their thank yous.

[MUSIC BED FADES OUT]

[Megan Cogswell]: It was August of 2002. I was diagnosed with stage four nasopharyngeal cancer. It was a tumor in my sinuses. And as soon as I was diagnosed, they decided to do both radiation and chemotherapy at the same time to hit it as hard as they possibly could.

[Tatum]: This is Megan Cogswell. She is a math teacher at Carmel High School. She was not treated by Doctor Birhiray but went through the same thing as some of his patients.

[Mrs. Cogswell]: The chemotherapy in my case was to help if the cancer had spread anywhere else in my body. The radiation part of it is what really made me sick. I had radiation burns down my throat, so it made it really hard to swallow. And I couldn't eat anything, so I stopped eating for the longest time. So that was the biggest challenge I think was just those radiation burns down my throat 'cause it made it really hard to talk. I couldn't talk. I couldn't eat. And people would try to call me and talk to me to make me feel better, and it would just make me angry 'cause I didn't want to talk to anybody 'cause it hurt so bad. It was a pretty short nine week treatment, so I've been living cancer free since December of 2002.

[MUSIC BED FADES IN]

[Doctor Birhiray]: One of the things I've learned in my line of work is that sometimes you're successful and sometimes you're not. In the way that impact comes could be either because a family is grateful because somebody was cured of their disease, or somebody's illness was controlled and it did well. But also another way is when you get a call or when a family comes to visit you to thank you for the care of someone who did not survive their disease. But because you

did your very best, and they know that you did your very best. So I think I'm impacted when I feel like I've done my very best. But then you're even more rewarded in a way when people acknowledge that you did your very best.

[Doctor Birhiray]: Once I was at the AT&T store and working with somebody and trying to get an iPhone fixed. And they asked me what my name was. So I said what my name was. And it happens to be that this was the granddaughter of a patient that I took care of. And she said oh wow, you take care of my grandmother. And she told me who her grandmother was. And that was many years ago. And I do remember her very well. And she was just so grateful and told me how impactful the care that her grandmother received was for the rest of the family. So you do learn that it's not just that one person in front of you whose life is impacted. But rather there's a whole slew of people including that person. And so it's very important that you do your very best because you could make some people very happy in the process.

[Tatum]: For WHJE, this has been Tatum Prati. More stories like this can be found at whje.com.

[MUSIC BED FADES OUT]