

Youth featured on TV health show

A local girl is to be featured in an upcoming episode of the Discovery Health Channel's *Health on the Line* program.



REBECCA VAN FRAASSEN

The program, scheduled to air next week, will focus on Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) and center around Limehouse youngster Rebecca Van Fraassen, who has the disease—the number one genetic killer of children under the age of two. Rebecca, now four-years-old, was featured in an article in *The Independent & Free Press* this summer.

The program, hosted by Avery Haines, focuses on different health-related conditions and profiles individuals who have been affected by the conditions and medical professionals involved in their diagnosis and treatment.

Rebecca's mother, Theresa, said others who will be on the program include herself and her husband Doug, Rebecca's aunt, Louise Smith of Newmarket, who organized the fund-raiser Rebecca's Angel Run for SMA, Ottawa SMA expert Dr. Alex MacKenzie, and Bettylou Ross, who lost a son to the disease and has

another son currently affected by SMA.

"We couldn't have asked for better exposure," said Theresa. She said the program came about after a Discovery Channel producer overheard Smith talking about the run at a swim meet in Toronto.

Theresa said her daughter has been doing "really well" and she is feeling very optimistic about

Rebecca's prognosis since she was accepted to participate in a clinical trial for a drug that could be an effective treatment for the disease which destroys the nerves controlling voluntary movement affecting crawling, walking, head and neck control and even swallowing.

She is to begin taking the drug, valproic acid, in six months.

"It's the first time we've been given any hope," said Theresa. "If it works it would really be a miracle."

The program is to air on the Discovery Health Channel on Monday, November 3 and 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. and Tuesday, November 4 at 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. It is also to air on Toronto 1 on Wednesday, November 12 at noon.

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

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