

HEALTH

York Region transplant patients await life-changing operations

Waiting for life to begin

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

Brandyn Miller and Mark Black became buddies earlier this year, a friendship sealed when they found themselves the youngest patients on Toronto General Hospital's waiting list for double-lung and heart transplants.

Mr. Miller, a 23-year-old Aurora resident, joined the list in January.

Mr. Black, a 24-year-old Moncton, N.B. resident, who was staying with an uncle in Newmarket until he was admitted to hospital in April, has been on the list since last summer.

'He wasn't expected to make it past 12 hours. Then he wasn't expected to make it past the first few months. Then two, then five, then eight, then 10. It's just been patchwork jobs all the way along to keep him alive.'

Although both Mr. Miller and Mr. Black have supportive friends and family, they have a unique friendship that stems from an understanding of what it's like to be born with a medical condition that robs victims of normal, healthy lives.

Both were born with deformed hearts. Over time, their lungs have been destroyed, overworked as they try to oxygenate blood pumped from hearts too malformed to do the job properly.

The result, Mr. Miller said, is blood as thick as ketchup.

He also copes with excruciating pain, particularly in his legs, in the middle of the night.

Although there was a time as a child when he played T-ball and hide-and-seek with his friends — stopping to regain his strength when he began turning blue — his activities are far more limited these days.

Mr. Miller goes out to nightclubs with friends occasionally — they bicker about who gets to piggyback him on the short walk from the parking lot to the club because he gets too tired along the



STAFF PHOTO/ROB ALARY

Brandyn Miller, 23, was born with a deformed heart and was placed on a waiting list for double-lung and heart transplants in January.

way — but most days find him at home.

He has made the most of his confinement, establishing a small business designing websites for clients. His latest customer was the York Region Real Estate Board.

"It's a bit difficult, it's a bit frustrating, but I get along," Mr. Miller said. "I deal with it the way I deal with it. If I feel good, I get out and do something."

But lately, Mr. Miller hasn't been feeling good and so he spends his time waiting for an organ donor, a process doctors told him could take two years.

When his mother, Suzanne Miller, was three weeks from her due date, her doctor was worried about the health of

her baby, who was no longer growing inside her.

When he was born, the full extent of his cardiac problems became evident, including a malformed valve at the bottom of his heart and lungs that weren't connected to the pulmonary artery.

Mr. Miller, who was given an experimental drug, was born at Scarborough Centenary Hospital but transferred to the Hospital for Sick Children, where he spent the first four months of his life.

At 12 hours old, he had his first surgery. Despite other treatments, Mr.

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Human genome changes everything, expert warns

BY LINDA JOHNSON
Staff Writer

The most important day of last year was not Sept. 11, life sciences expert Juan Enriquez told a gathering of business leaders in Markham.

It was Feb. 12, the day the human genome was mapped for the first time.

Mr. Enriquez, director of the Life Sciences Project at Harvard University's School of Business, was speaking Thursday at the Wisdom Exchange, a two-day forum for Ontario's leading growth companies.

He told business leaders they will have to understand the human genome if they want to be successful.

"You don't have to be a microbiologist, but you must understand the language and make sure your kids understand it," he said.

"Are there consequences? Yes. Is it scary? Yes. Will it be easy to keep out? No. It changes everything. That's why it's so important for everyone to get literate and participate in the debate."

He said the full impact of genome research may not be known for decades or even centuries.

"So, on Feb. 12 last year, suddenly, we could all get on the Internet and get a map of ourselves," he said as he stood in front of a screen on which he had projected a picture of a single human gene.

"We may not have a clue where the process is going. But it doesn't mean it hasn't already started," he said.

More than at any other time in history, Mr. Enriquez said the ability to transmit data is the most

important key to a successful economy. He compared the reading of the human gene to mankind's earlier progress from cave-wall images through hieroglyphics, Chinese writing, the 26-character alphabet and, finally, to digital combination in the 1950s.

And he warned business leaders against ignoring the coming revolution in gene technology.

'Are there consequences? Yes.'

'Is it scary? Yes.'

'Will it be easy to keep out? No.'

'It changes everything.'

"You can't keep it out. Those who said, 'This is the way I've done it for centuries and I will continue to do it this way,' that's the way nations rise and fall."

The advance will likely be felt by all companies, whether or not they are involved in life sciences, Mr. Enriquez predicted.

Although it won't hit most companies directly, he noted business could be affected by changes in health-care costs.

"The nature of medicine will change and the new cost of health care will affect your company," he said, adding the cost of drugs in Canada now exceeds the cost of doctors.

Business and governments worldwide must

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