



Teonna Woolford

Sickle Cell Disease

Owings Mills, MD

“I was already running out of options ten years ago and anything that delays access to new potential treatments is a serious threat for me and every other sickle cell patient.”

Teonna Woolford is 29 years old and has lived with sickle cell disease since diagnosis as a baby. In that time, she has recovered from numerous complications including bilateral hip replacements, a failed bone marrow transplant, drug allergies and many pain crises.

Sickle cell disease is a group of genetic diseases that affect the red blood cells causing a host of often painful health issues that worsen over time. With no cure and limited treatment options, sickle cell patients must manage their symptoms under the care of several types of specialist doctors and a variety of medications used to treat different impacts of the disease. For Teonna, her sickle cell symptoms exacerbated significantly at puberty, and at age 19, she had a bone marrow transplant which her body ultimately rejected.

For twenty years only one treatment, a chemotherapy, was available to treat sickle cell patients. More recently, three new treatments have been approved by the FDA, one of which came through the accelerated approval pathway, and each with unique considerations. These groundbreaking innovations have blazed a trail for the next generation of transformative treatments for sickle cell patients. However, two of the three available treatments cause allergic reactions that prevent Teonna from utilizing those options to help manage the risks and complications of her rare disease. Currently, she takes nine medications to help address the various impacts of her sickle cell disease, and because of her experience, Teonna encourages patients and their families to seek as much information as possible as they consider with their doctors the benefits and risks of each treatment option.

Sickle cell disease is far more likely to affect people of color, and efforts to manage this complex chronic condition frequently run into challenges related to health disparities, racism and stigma, access to care and step therapy. For sickle cell patients, like all others who stand to benefit from drugs approved through the FDA's expedited programs, because of the constant balance of complications and the lack of treatments available, time is of the essence when it comes to accessing effective options.

Having had to make serious reproductive decisions at a very young age due to treatment side effects, Teonna is particularly passionate about advocacy for reproductive health awareness and founded the Sickle Cell Reproductive Health Education Directive. Today, Teonna uses her personal experience and vast network of patients, advocates and health care connections to raise awareness and improve outcomes for those living with sickle cell disease now and in the future.