

Isabella Maldonado  
10<sup>th</sup> Grade  
St. Pius X  
New Mexico

### “Pancreatitis Drives Me...”

When I was four years old, I was diagnosed with Chronic Hereditary Pancreatitis and experienced my first hospital stay. Chronic Hereditary Pancreatitis is an illness where the pancreas attacks itself causing severe stomach pain. Since this happened, I have had over twenty-five hospital stays, missed significant amounts of school/sports, and followed a low fat/fat free diet (which was not fun). I have been to hospitals in Colorado, Minnesota, Texas, Nevada, Ohio, Florida, North Carolina, and in my home state of New Mexico. I have also seen many doctors throughout my lifetime for care and treatment, surgeries, and management of all my medical conditions.

I suffered with the pain of pancreatitis for eight years but in the summer of 2013, I had a major surgery called a Total Pancreatectomy with an Auto Islet Cell Transplant (TP-IAT) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. My whole pancreas was removed and the islet cells from the pancreas were transplanted into my liver, while my spleen, duodenum, and gallbladder were also removed. This has caused me to become a Type 3c Diabetic, so I have a team of specialists in Albuquerque, Denver, and Minneapolis, that I see on a regular basis. Since living with pancreatitis, and now becoming a diabetic, I interact with many doctors all the time. This has made me want to strive to become a pediatric surgeon one day. I want to be the positive change in children’s lives, who see a doctor regularly.

When I was little many doctors did not know or understand what my illness was and to this day some doctors still misdiagnose children who suffer from pancreatitis. They did not believe my pain and treated me poorly when I felt sick. I want to be a doctor who is understanding and listens, not only to the parents, but to the children! I would like to be an advocate to make a change in the diagnosing and treatment in pediatric pancreatitis, from my experience with hereditary pancreatitis. I do not want to see children suffer from chronic pain with any sort of disease. I want to be able to assist, support, and encourage them and their families with their medical needs, to lead to their overall happiness and not let their medical conditions hold them back in their day-to-day life. I love to see children smile and to see them smile because they have no more pain would push me to work harder each and every day.

On my free time I love to learn new things about the human body or different types of medical disorders. I even have a picture of a pancreas up in my room! My main interest is general surgery. I love how there are many organs involved in general surgery. Because of my experiences with pancreatitis, I now aspire to be one of the best pediatric general surgeons in New Mexico, to help New Mexico’s children get back to their lives, enjoy delicious food, play sports, and have a great time with all their friends!