

**Gastroparesis and Dysmotilities
Association
GPDA**

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Press Release

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A North American fundraiser for people who suffer from a poorly understood stomach illness

The call has gone out to patients and families to “Move for GI Motility” from April 5th through the 12th. This fundraiser will culminate with a symbolic bicycle ride from Windsor to Detroit by the non-profit association founder in an effort to unite families who are suffering, and to raise vital funds for research.

Responding to the expressed desire of patients and families suffering with a poorly understood stomach illness, the President and Founder of the Gastroparesis and Dysmotilities Association has teamed up with our outreach volunteer, Bethellen Coughran, a Brownstown, Michigan resident.

Bethellen Coughran has been suffering with a little known stomach disorder called gastroparesis. Imagine vomiting several times each and every day for years as Bethellen did. She quickly became dehydrated and experienced dramatic weight loss. Since many doctors are unfamiliar with this disorder, it took quite a while for Bethellen to be accurately diagnosed. Since Bethellen’s stomach can no longer process food, she must now maintain her weight by feeding herself through a tube that has been implanted into her small intestine.

Gastroparesis literally means “weakened stomach.” It is the most common of the paralytic disorders of the gut. These disorders are characterized by weak contractions or altered motility occurring somewhere along the digestive tract which prevents food from moving through the body. As a result, the backup of food leads to feelings of fullness, nausea, vomiting and abdominal distention resulting in pain. Without a special diet or nutritional support via tubes, sufferers of gastroparesis will starve to death.

Gastroparesis is a very common stomach disorder in people suffering with Type I or II diabetes. What is not well understood by the medical community is how some people develop this problem apparently for unknown reasons, as is the case with Bethellen.

Treating gastroparesis is very frustrating since there are only two drugs approved in the United States for this disease and many people do not respond well to these medications. A couple of new drugs are in clinical trials and this will help give more options to people like Bethellen, but it could be a long wait.

A novel approach to the treatment of gastroparesis is gaining in popularity across the nation. It is a medical device very similar to the heart pacemaker, which, when implanted on the inner surface of the stomach, delivers small shocks to help tone up the stomach. For some patients, the device greatly reduces nausea and vomiting and leads to a dramatically improvement in their quality of life.

But for others, sadly, this is not always the case. Bethellen was one of the first patients in the state of Michigan to receive this device; yet it has not given Bethellen her life back. She still experiences disabling symptoms.

Bethellen's is not an uncommon story among those who suffer with gastroparesis. Jeanne Keith-Ferris, President and Founder of the Gastroparesis and Dysmotilities Association, knows more needs to be done and soon. "People need more effective treatment options. This disorder has received too little funding for research, and it is not even considered a rare disorder. It is thought that up to 8 million Americans suffer to some degree with gastroparesis," Jeanne said. "It is the job of our non-profit association to get this illness on the radar screen and get some action going to find answers."

Debilitating symptoms are not going to stop Bethellen from meeting Jeanne by Ambassador Bridge at the Windsor-Detroit border crossing on Saturday, April 12th. The Founder of GPDA will cycle to the old Tiger Stadium to cap off this week-long North American Fundraiser. "I am sure we will have a lot of hugs and tears for each other since this will be the first time I have met Bethellen in person," says the President of GPDA.