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After experimental Covid-19 treatment, 80-year-old woman thankful to be home

Dan Herbeck

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As Judith Smentkiewicz fought for her life in a local hospital last month, she had no idea that her struggle with Covid-19 was the subject of a heated court battle and stories in the news media.

Until a few days ago, the 80-year-old woman was unaware that her family's lawyers had obtained a court order enabling her to receive doses of Ivermectin, a drug that has not yet been approved by the federal government as a Covid-19 treatment.

Now that she's back at her Cheektowaga home and well on the road to recovery, Smentkiewicz is amazed at everything that happened to her.

"I had no idea that any of this was going on," Smentkiewicz told The Buffalo News in an interview. "My son and daughter didn't tell me the whole story until I got home.

"They just wanted me to take care of myself and get better."

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Unapproved by FDA, Ivermectin useful as Covid-19 treatment, local doctors say

Smentkiewicz said she has “absolutely no memory” of a five-day period when she was on a ventilator at Millard Fillmore Suburban Hospital. According to family members, doctors there told them that her chances of survival were about 20%.

“I remember being taken to the hospital in an ambulance on Dec. 31, and being put on a stretcher in a hallway,” Smentkiewicz said. “I know they put me on the ventilator that day, but I don’t remember a single thing that happened until Jan. 4, when I was taken off the ventilator and able to sit up in my bed. I’m kind of glad I don’t remember those days.”

She now knows that her son, Michael, and daughter, Michelle Kulbacki, insisted that doctors give Smentkiewicz Ivermectin, a drug that has helped Covid-19 patients in other countries but has not yet been approved as a Covid-19 treatment in the U.S.

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She also realizes that, when doctors were reluctant to give her more than one dose of the drug, her son and daughter hired attorneys Ralph C. Lorigo and Jon F. Minear to get a court order that enabled her to get more doses.

On Jan. 8, State Supreme Court **Justice Henry J. Nowak ordered the hospital to resume treatment with Ivermectin.** After that, Smentkiewicz made a strong recovery. She was able to leave the hospital in mid-January.



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She then spent a month in the Harris Hill Nursing Facility in Amherst, and on Tuesday, she returned home.

“I am so appreciative of my family, the lawyers, the judge, the doctors, and all these people who were praying for me and fighting for me,” said Smentkiewicz, speaking to a reporter in a strong, clear voice. “I know I had a lot of prayer warriors on my side.”

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“While she was on the ventilator, we prayed for Mom. We prayed to God, and the answer that came back to us was Ivermectin,” Kulbacki said. “My brother was doing some research on his own and came up with the information about Ivermectin. Nothing else was helping our mother. We read that Ivermectin was helping other people and had no dangerous side effects. We decided we had to try it.”

Kulbacki said her mother made “a complete turnaround” within days of her first doses of Ivermectin.



Judith Smentkiewicz with her daughter Michelle Kulbacki and her two dogs, Kallie, left, and Mylie.

John Hickey

Smentkiewicz said she got “very good” care in the hospital and nursing home, and now feels she is “at about 85%” of where she was before she caught the virus.

“I’m eating, walking, exercising, getting myself dressed and making my own bed, getting back to normal life little by little,” she said. “I feel good, but I get out of breath if I try to do too much. I’m having a little trouble with balance and doing physical

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therapy twice a week.”

For years, she has been active as a volunteer at the Chapel in Cheektowaga, where she babysits young children while their parents attend Sunday services.

Smentkiewicz said she is anxious to get back to that, and also wants to expand her volunteer activities.

“One thing I saw in the nursing home was so many elderly people who just wanted someone to come in, help them open their mail and talk with them for a while,” she said. “I think I would like to go in as a volunteer and visit with people who need that.”

She added that the publicity about her case will encourage families of suffering Covid-19 patients to research the possibility of using Ivermectin to treat them.

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Ivermectin is a controversial Covid-19 treatment.

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The U.S. Food & Drug Administration advises doctors against using it to treat coronavirus, saying more testing is needed. The FDA said that the drug needs to go through standard clinical trials before it can be approved as a Covid-19 treatment. The company that developed Ivermectin has also cautioned that more study is needed.

The effectiveness of a drug cannot be judged based on positive results for one patient, said Dr. Thomas A. Russo, chief of infectious diseases at the University at Buffalo's Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

The National Institutes of Health, a federal research agency that helps determine national policies on medical care, does not advise for or against using Ivermectin as a Covid-19 treatment, saying doctors and patients should make their own decisions.

But a growing number of American physicians – including some in Western New York – are offering their patients Ivermectin to combat the virus.

A nonprofit organization of doctors, the Frontline Covid-19 Critical Care Alliance, has been urging the federal government to speed up its testing of Ivermectin.

Doctors recently told The News that Ivermectin has helped many patients at two of the region's busiest Covid-19 treatment centers – the Elderwood Health Care facility in Amherst and the McGuire Group's Harris Hill facility.

Dr. Thomas Madejski, a former president of the New York State Medical Society, said he has also used Ivermectin as an effective treatment for Covid-19 patients in Erie, Niagara and Orleans counties.

“It has very benign side effects, and that is one reason I have been offering it to patients,” said Madejski, who said he was speaking only for himself, and not for the state medical society.

Smentkiewicz said she has no way of knowing if Ivermectin is a miracle drug. She said she is thankful she did not become one of the nearly 500,000 Americans killed by Covid-19.

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“I can’t say it will help everyone, but I definitely believe it helped me, with no side effects,” Smentkiewicz said.

“I feel that God kept me around for a reason. He had a plan for me,” she added. “I believe that part of that plan is to get people to take a closer look at Ivermectin.”

Dan Herbeck

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