

My name is Dr. DeDe Wohlfarth and I am a clinical psychologist who specializes in children and families who have endured trauma and abuse. I teach at historic Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky. I love my work, but I also love my family. I live with my husband and our four teenage children, who, despite being teenagers, are still wonderful people. ¾ of them currently have their driver's permit, so every day helps me practice patience. We live in a 1918 farmhouse in rural Southern Indiana that we are constantly remodeling. I try daily to connect with God through prayer and meditation. I am an avid athlete who enjoys running, weightlifting, and yoga. I am also an Fibro Muscular Dysplasia (FMD) patient.



My FMD story goes like this: About five years ago, I was swimming at our local YMCA when I had a terrible pain in my chest, like being stabbed. After trying to ignore the pain for a few days (dumb idea), I eventually went to my doctor and immediately was admitted to the hospital. I learned I had a 5 cm. tear in my Superior Mesenteric Artery, the main artery that runs from your heart to your stomach. The next few months consisted of pain, misdiagnoses, painful tests that I couldn't afford, and gloomy prognosis. Every medical professional I met differed on what was wrong, but all reiterated that I should have died and was lucky to be alive. Fast forward through 6 months, when I finally get diagnosed with multi-focal FMD and find the incredibly competent and loving Dr. Gornik and the entire amazing staff of the Cleveland Clinic. Here are some of my learnings from the journey:

1. Become your own health advocate. Read research articles. Ask questions, even if your doctor gets annoyed. Trust that you know your body better than anyone else.
2. Almost dying/ living with a chronic disease gives us clear perspective on what is *really* important in life and how we want to live your days. If I could take away my disease magically, but lose the spiritual growth that came with it, I would choose to keep them both.
3. Some friends are willing to walk in the cave of darkness with you. Other friends just wait on the outside of the cave in the sun, and say things like, "Let me know if you need anything." Those friends who show the courage to face the darkness with you are true treasures.
4. Embrace today. Yes, we live with risks of future dissections, aneurysms, and strokes, but I am alive to write this. You are alive to read this. Every day brings something good; find it and celebrate it.
5. You can still have an active and rich life with FMD. No, I can't skydive and ride rollercoasters any more, but I still do obstacle course runs, go kayaking, and this summer, I hiked Angel's Landing at Zion National Park.
6. Let's work together to truly build health care that works: Where doctors listen to patients; where mental, physical, and spiritual health are seamlessly integrated; and where all people, including people of color, poor people, and LGBTQ+ people, have equal access to high quality health services.