Child of the Month

By Rich Petersen

María Fernanda Aimar Obregón

This angelic face belongs to 13-year old María Fernanda Aimar Obregón. Fernanda lives in Ajijic with her younger sister and her father, Sergio, who is a stained glass artist. Sergio is a single Dad, raising his two daughters on his own and doing a great job.

Fernanda had been quite healthy up until last October when she was diagnosed with SLE (systemic lupus erythematosus). The diagnosis was a shock to her and her father since there had been no preceding health problems. Just after her diagnosis, Fernanda suffered a heart attack and was rushed to the Hospital Civil in Guadalajara where she recovered from the heart attack after a two-week stay in the hospital. At that time the diagnosis of lupus was made.

Lupus is an autoimmune disorder, which means there is something amiss with the body's normal immune system response. For most of us our immune system protects us from harmful substances, but in someone with lupus the immune system can't tell the difference between a "harmful" substance and a healthy one, so this out-of-control immune system begins to attack otherwise healthy cells and tissue. This leads to long-term inflammation of one or more organs or body systems, but always with the fear that another organ or system will be compromised in the future. The heart attack in such a young girl meant that her immune system had taken aim at her otherwise healthy heart.

There is no cure for lupus and treatment depends on the severity of each person's symptoms; many people only need non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, some need corticosteroids; others need more serious medication and treatment, but all lupus patients are to avoid direct sunlight and always wear a high SPF sun screen when outside.

Luckily for María Fernanda some very competent doctors took up her case and immediately started her on anti-inflammatory meds plus chemotherapy in fairly high doses in order to combat the attacks on her body. She responded very well to this and after leaving the hospital started monthly chemotherapy sessions for the next six months. She has responded so well to this that her doctors have changed her chemo schedule to every once every three months for the next two years. She is also on multiple medications for blood pressure, heart rhythm, and is being seen by a rheumatologist. Her medication doses have been cut back recently, she is responding well to her chemo, and is back in school here in Ajijic. When asked what classes she was best in, she responded "all of them."

Niños Incapacitados has paid for Fernanda's hospital stays for her chemo, the chemo itself, various lab tests (which are ongoing) and of course doctor consults. Her prognosis at present is very good and at age 13 she is capable of understanding a lot about her condition and knows what to do and what not to do with regard to keeping healthy. We are very optimistic that this little girl will continue her life without further incident.

Niños Incapacitados takes the summer off in the sense that we have no monthly meetings in June, July or August since so many of our members are away for the summer months. We do not stop assisting our families with their medical expenses during this time, so donations are still most welcome. Please see our website www.programaninos.org for more information, and mark Thursday, September 8 as the date of our next regular members' meeting at the Hotel Real de Chapala in La Floresta. Please come and meet another one of the children we are helping.