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THE PEDIATRIC SPECIALIST

An against-all-odds case consumes Anwar Vardag.

The patient is in septic shock—one of the most feared kinds of medical conditions. It's an overwhelming infection that can cause your vital functions to tumble like dominos.

When the patient gets to the emergency room, he's already "coding"—his heart rate is frightfully low and he has to be resuscitated.

In this case, that patient is only 10.

Dr. Anwar Vardag, who oversees pediatric critical care at West Boca Medical Center, rushes to the ER and runs a tube into the boy's lungs to keep him breathing. The boy had previously been diagnosed with anemia—he didn't have enough red blood cells to carry blood throughout his body. He was taking medication and receiving shots to control it.

Perhaps because doses were missed, or a shot was given late, he goes into "full-blown septic shock." That causes problems with clotting—nothing is stopping the bleeding that's being caused by the infection.

"He was bleeding from everywhere, from his mouth and nose, his urinary tract, his lungs," Vardag says. "So chances were very, very slim for him to pull through.

"Septic shock, once you start with the multiple organ failure, then it's a downhill course. Your prognosis depends upon how many organs are failing. The more organs that are failed, the less chances of recovery."

The chances in this case, Vardag says, are less than 20 percent. The young boy has kidney failure—he doesn't expel a drop of urine for six weeks. He has liver failure. His clotting system is broken. He has heart failure. His

lungs are failing. And he is comatose.

It is unusual for one patient to have two nurses assigned to him. This boy has three. They order anti-thrombin-3, which at the time is a new but effective way of getting the body to form clots. Because it is so new, two days of it cost about \$80,000. The boy will become the first case of dialysis performed at the hospital.

Vardag, an 18-year veteran at the hospital with a soft but business-like voice and a finely trimmed goatee, says he chose pediatric medicine largely for its purity. It is medical care without the workman's comp issues, without health problems brought on because of patients' bad habits.

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Vardag—who says he turns off his emotions and "becomes a robot"—stays at the hospital constantly, sleeping for several nights on his office couch. The boy, miraculously, pulls through.

"He [defied all] odds," Vardag says.

Vardag struggles to keep his emotions in check—even though this case happened 15 years ago. Eventually, Vardag met the boy, who caught up with his schoolwork and graduated college. To this day, the family, each year, sends Vardag a Christmas card and thanks him.

"That was so many years ago," he says. "But I shall never forget those few months that he was with us."