

SIGN UP TO **SAVE LIVES**

For more than 30,000 newborn babies every year, congenital CMV will likely mean a lifetime of health problems. For one in every five of those children—about one child every hour—it will mean permanent, irreversible physical, cognitive, or sensory deficits. For as many as 400 children annually, it will be a death sentence.

“We need to save those babies, and we can”

says Kristen Spytek, Co-Founder and President of the non-profit National CMV Foundation, a five-year-old organization founded by women whose children were born with congenital CMV and dedicated to eradicating it.

“That’s our mission,” Spytek explains, “we’re working to raise awareness, share prevention information, and inform national research priorities. We know the virus is persistent. It’s present all around us...ubiquitous and largely harmless. But for babies it can wreak havoc. We don’t want to scare women, but we want them to know that there is another thing they should be aware of. We know women want this information from their medical teams and they’re not getting it.”

Currently, the foundation is focusing their passion on the drive to add CMV to the Recommended Uniform Screening Panel (RUSP) for newborns. Because, at GSW, we understand that kind of passion, we’ve made their passion our latest Passion Project.

We bring a passion for health advocacy to the work we do every day. And then we take it further, to the work we call our Passion Projects: projects that help bring hope, health, and healing to people who rely on the charitable groups we partner with. Over the years, we’ve partnered with Cure SMA (spinal muscular atrophy), the Movember Foundation, Mental Health America, MiracleFeet, NYC Botanics, and many others. And we continue this work because it helps bring to life issues and causes that may not have the resources or the reach we can provide.

“Newborn screening is vital,” Spytek says. “Most babies with congenital CMV are born asymptomatic—that is, perfectly healthy—and then many go on to have progressive, early-onset hearing loss. Without a diagnosis at birth, these children are missing out on the early intervention and potential treatment options that are critical for early childhood development.”

Screening every child for CMV at birth is the only way to know if an asymptomatic child has the virus. In general, the medical community works on the premise that since there is no intervention or treatment for newborns, whether parents know about a child’s CMV or not doesn’t matter. There’s nothing to be done at that time.

Spytek says this standard of care is putting thousands of newborns at risk annually.



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“For this virus in particular, its silent nature makes it especially insidious and the virus clears a baby’s system about three weeks after birth so there’s no chance of catching it later. And catching it early is absolutely essential for the 8,000 babies a year who will go on to have deficits from the infection.

For these families, many go through a diagnostic odyssey—years of tests and screenings, pokes and prodding—trying to narrow down what in the world could be happening, because the virus manifests in so many different ways. If they had the diagnosis when the child was born, it opens the door to a completely different path—one that prioritizes child development and long-term outcomes. Parents deserve to know so they can make the best decisions for their child.”

The Foundation has been working since its inception to draw attention to CMV and to get CMV onto the RUSP for babies.

“We needed help,” Spytek says, “but we couldn’t get anyone’s attention, especially in the medical field.”

“With so much at stake,” Capanear explains, “CMV has flown under the radar for too long. The CMV Foundation needed a way to grab a national spotlight and push the envelope on a long-overlooked crisis. And we are excited to be able to help.

“We asked internationally-known, award-winning photographer—Ale Buset to work with us. He said yes, and between us, we’ve created a campaign that reaches out from its printed page and grabs you. The cause needed shock and awe. And it got it.”

Each full-page ad shows a pregnant woman in one of two poses: holding an arm across her chest with her right hand poised as if reciting a pledge, or with one hand covering each breast, thumbs up. In each photo, the unborn baby seems to mimic the mother’s gesture.

The short copy is simple, yet challenging. Each ad makes a statement, in capital letters: TODAY, NEWBORN SCREENING FOR THE NO. 1 VIRAL CAUSE OF BIRTH DEFECTS ISN’T STANDARD PRACTICE. Each ad then either makes another statement—LET’S ALL PLEDGE TO CHANGE THAT—or asks a question—ANYONE ELSE THINK IT SHOULD BE?

Spytek and the Foundation are thrilled: “It is shock and awe. It is head-turning. It is harrowing. And it’s inspiring because it’s empowering. It’s asking for change, a call to action to drive people to sign a petition, to create change at the federal level.”

Yes, these ads are provocative. They’re meant to be. For the parents of tomorrow’s children, little could be more important than making sure their child is tested for this potentially devastating virus. The message needs to be bold and brazen, and unmistakable. Because the drive to have every newborn tested needs to be everyone’s drive.

The campaign is already receiving praise. It was selected to be included in Lürzer’s Archive Vol. 3/2019 and Act-Responsible has chosen it to be featured at Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity this year.

If you agree, we encourage you to join us in supporting the CMV Foundation’s work to make CMV screening for every newborn universally recommended. The Advisory Committee on Heritable Disorders in Newborns and Children (ACHDNC) and the Secretary of Health and Human Services oversee the application process. To help them make the final decision—and help the thousands of children yet to be born—we urge you to sign the petition [here](#). Once you’ve signed, please share it with friends and family and encourage them to sign too.

Our campaign asks a question. Please sign this petition so that someday that question won’t need to be asked again.

