12 November, 2010

Dear BallouSkies Team,

Greetings from The Ohio State University, where we have made significant progress with your invaluable support. This letter summarizes how far we've come in a short time to finding better ways to help boys with muscular dystrophy live longer, healthier lives. Our goals are to: 1) improve diagnosis of heart muscle disease for individuals with muscular dystrophies with noninvasive, high-resolution heart imaging so that beneficial treatment can be started sooner, 2) better understand through research how muscle can be protected from damage to guide development of better treatments, and 3) educate doctors and scientists so that our advances can benefit patients all around the world.

Our progress in the last 6 months has been incredible. In this short time, several dozen patients with muscular dystrophies have been better diagnosed at OSU with our refined methods of detecting heart muscle disease, and many have been started on existing medicines proven to protect heart muscle from further damage that they might not otherwise have received. A huge step forward has been in researching how these heart medicines might prevent muscle damage: while the heart seems to benefit, there appears to be even more dramatic improvement in leg and breathing muscle strength with much less scarring than what develops without treatment. This preliminary work was done in mice with genetic changes that cause similar muscle weakening that people with muscular dystrophy develop. We are working very hard with donated time from researchers plus funds from other sources to complete this work so that it will withstand the scrutiny of the rigorous review process needed to publish our findings in a high impact scientific journal that can reach doctors and scientists worldwide. Finally, we've written a comprehensive review article on how the heart is affected in muscular dystrophies that has been accepted for publication in January, 2011 by the American Heart Association (acknowledging BallouSkies in print for the world to know your impact!). This goes a long way towards educating doctors, especially those who look at the heart in patients with muscular dystrophies, to recognize early changes in the heart; early treatment can ideally *prevent* devastating complications like heart failure and death due to heart muscle weakening, but only if it is properly recognized.

We've come a long way, but we have so much more to do. For example, we do not know why the medications we chose for our study seems to work so well, what limitations there might be in terms of when treatment is effective, or if it works the same in patients. To answer these questions requires further refinement of studies we have underway, and expansion of our work to other centers that care for muscular dystrophy patients. With the continued support of BallouSkies, we are confident that our dedicated team of researchers and physicians will find the answers to these questions to ultimately improve the lives of people with muscular dystrophies. We thank you for your commitment to helping us achieve these goals and we renew our pledge to be careful stewards of your support.

Wishing you good health, good friends and good cheer in 2011,

Subha V. Raman, M.D., M.S.E.E.
Associate Professor
Department of Internal Medicine
Medical Director, CMR/CT

Jill Rafael-Fortney, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Molecular and Cellular Biochemistry
Director, Ohio State Biochemistry Program