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Olivia Hernandez:Running for awareness

"Quitting is never an option"

By April Kibbe

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Olivia Hernandez runs to spread awareness about her illness, neurofibromatosis.

The disease is a debilitating neurological disorder that causes deafness, blindness, paralysis, disequilibria, chronic pain and disfigurement.

"I was diagnosed with NF2 as a baby," Hernandez said. "I have had multiple spinal surgeries and radiation treatments for five brain tumors."

Hernandez undergoes radiation treatments to shrink the five tumors in her head.

"My head swells up and hurts from the radiation," Hernandez said. "But I don't want to have the tumors removed. It's too dangerous."

The disease has affected Hernandez's hearing.

"I remember talking on the phone one night," she said. "I could not hear very well. When

I woke up the next day, I was deaf."

Hernandez's mother was deaf, almost blind, and paralyzed from the waist down when she died at age 39. Hernandez's six-year-old son has been diagnosed with the disease.

"My son has already lost vision in one eye," Hernandez said.

Although the disease has taken over Hernandez's hearing, she is still in control of her education.

"I am majoring in philosophy," Hernandez said.

She uses real-time caption when attending class.

"It's a little hard but it's fun," she said. "Chaffey has accommodated my needs very well."

Hernandez spends a lot of her time concentrating on her family, education and training for marathons. She is involved with the NF Endurance Team. She is also the team captain for the Children's Tumor Foundation, the largest non-government-funded charity foundation raising money for vital research.

Hernandez was scheduled to run a marathon in Long Beach on Oct. 11.

"I suffer from chronic pain and disequilibria," Hernandez said. "My illness has taken so much from me. The only way I know how to fight back is to run."

The disease is an everyday challenge and she feels blessed to live the beautiful life she is living.

Hernandez is not just firing up her running shoes for herself. She is doing it for her friends and family battling this disease as well.

"My children deserve to grow up with a healthy mommy," Hernandez said. "Quitting is never an option!"

For more information about NF2, visit www.cfb.org.

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David Coon

Olivia Hernandez says the only way she knows how to fight against her illness is through running.

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