Hello all,

Perhaps some of you remember that I said my wife and I were facing a difficult pregnancy.  I am writing this email to say that Lily Marie Gullage was born by C-Section on July 6, 2012 at 5:38 a.m.

She had only one kidney that did not function at all through the pregnancy and so her lungs did not develop properly (as was predicted by the doctors).  Please allow me to tell this story, not only because I would prefer to tell as many people at once as possible, but also to share how God was with us throughout this entire difficult time.

For the first few hours, we had a great deal of hope that maybe the doctors had misdiagnosed the problem or had accidentally exaggerated her condition.  When we got there, they reminded us that she would likely not make it, and that she would probably arrive already dying.  In fact, the pediatrician asked me how far he should go to resuscitate my baby.  I told him to do as much as possible if there was any sign she would respond or could make it, but to cause her no pain if it was hopeless.  They prepped Lacy, who arrived at the hospital already ready to give birth because Lacy was far tougher than I ever thought and we didn't realize she was in full-on labor until it was almost too late.  Less than an hour after they took her back, the baby was out and she gave a little cry, and then another one.  Then, the doctors worked to try and get her breathing on her own.  She never cried again.

It was a very painful roller coaster after that.  Doctors and nurses told us she was not getting enough oxygen, then they said her numbers went up.  They confirmed the crying was a good thing, but they said her kidneys did not show signs of functioning.  The pediatrician said that, in light of all the response she was giving to treatment, her prognosis was still grim.  They decided she needed to go to Montgomery to the NICU there, and perhaps there would be the possibility they could save her life.

Lacy could not go down there, so I went with my mother and sister to be with my daughter.  We found our way to the NICU through the very narrow corridors of BHCS, which did not make a very good first impression on us.  We were asked to wait in a windowless room where people talked of normal births while I waited for ultrasounds to confirm or deny that Lily would make it.  The doctor came in and dismissed the other people from the room.  He told me that he'd done everything he could, and that the baby's blood-gas numbers were growing increasingly worse.  Her kidney had never functioned and neither had her bladder ever produced amniotic fluid.  Basically, the doctors and nurses told me that the machines were the only things keeping her alive and that to continue to do so, they would have to cause her harm and possible pain.  The nurses kept her asleep throughout this time, and allowed me to come and see her.  She was, despite the predictions of ultrasounds, a beautiful little girl, weighing 4 lbs 6 oz. and measuring 17 inches long.  She was small and frail, but she was so very beautiful.  I stood by her and petted her head and held her tiny hands, each of which was no bigger than a quarter.  Tickling her feet made her spread her little toes.  Otherwise, she was not awake.  They kept her hooked up to breathing machines and tubes and wires that looked horribly uncomfortable and made the worst sounds as they helped her breathe.  They said that she didn't feel anything, because they had her on opiates and other forms of sedatives.

The nurses talked about transporting Lacy down to be with her, once we discovered that she would not make it much longer, but the doctors in Opelika said that it was too risky, and honestly I was relieved they made that decision, because I could not bear to lose both my daughter and my wife.  So, Lacy would have to stay in Opelika while I waited to see if anything could be done with little Lily.

By this time, I had been awake since 9:30 Thursday morning, and it was now around 6:00 p.m. on Friday night.  I had been awake well beyond twenty-four hours straight with absolutely no sleep.  The nurses arranged to let me stay in a room, because no one was going to get me to leave and because I was about to pass out from exhaustion.  I went to sleep for about 3 hours.  My brother-in-law woke me when he arrived with things for my mother and sister to stay with me in Montgomery.  He awoke me to tell me that they had called the Chaplain to the NICU and that Lily had taken a turn for the worst.  Her blood pressure was dropping.  Her lungs were oxygenating more and more inefficiently, and she would probably not last the night.  I asked and asked and asked if there was any way she could survive, if there was anything that could be done for her.  I even asked about stem cells, but they said that nothing could be done.  They said that the only way she could live would be to have more chemicals and to continue to have the machines breathe for her, but this would only prolong the inevitable.  She was dying.

They let me hold her for a while, and they gave me the forms to stop resuscitation.  I called Lacy and we decided that we would not let her suffer.  I decided to stop resuscitation and let her go.  I let Lacy talk to her over the phone as they unhooked her.  Then, they handed her to me and let me hold her until she quietly left us to go to heaven.  They allowed my family to transport her back to EAMC so that Lacy could hold her.  It didn't look as though she were gone at all, but merely sleeping.  She was so very beautiful.  She passed away on July 6, 2012 at 9:40 p.m.

I want to say that I saw God during this time.  I felt his presence.  The nurses and doctors surrounded me as I held her.  They prayed with me and encouraged me.  And they cried with me.  Throughout this process, I felt God's hand on me and my wife.  Without the support of the staff of both hospitals and my family and Lacy's family, we could not have survived this ordeal.  We were also blessed by several ministries in the BHCS, including the HALO ministry which took very tasteful memorial pictures of little Lily Marie, and Threads of Love who made and donated dresses for her.  The hospital also donated keepsakes to us on her behalf.  This was the absolute worst decision I have ever had to make, and I hope I never have to make another like it in my life.  I cannot say enough about the kindnesses we received from the staff of the hospitals who showed not only the utmost professionalism, but also the best of God's mercy and compassion to my daughter, my wife, myself, and my family.

We are still recovering now after Lily Marie's funeral took place on Monday at sunset, July 9, 2012.  Lacy is recovering well from the surgery, and we are clinging to each other and to God.

Jared Gullage