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Ob Hospitalist Group clinician testimonial



He Pedaled With Mettle And Raised Almost \$4,000 for Charity

By April Morris

Resplendent in his bright blue Ob Hospitalist Group cycling jersey, Dr. John McHugh departed from Mont Saint Michel the morning of June 25 to cycle the first leg of a grueling 21-stage, 2,077-mile fundraising odyssey that shadows the route professional cyclists take in the Tour de France. The annual event, **Tour de Force**, raises money for the William Wates Memorial Trust, which funds grant projects to help disadvantaged youth reach their full potential.

An OBHG hospitalist at St. Bernardine Medical Center in San Bernardino, California, McHugh trained for months, focusing on hills, in preparation for the challenge. The 6'5" physician rides a high-tech KHS 780, a carbon-fiber road bike with Ultegra electronic shifters and a Bontrager computer that measures distance, velocity, and cadence. It was custom-made to fit his frame.

"In Southern California, where I live, I like to ride up Palomar Mountain, and there are many climbing rides near Laguna Beach," he said.

Being a hospitalist with a flexible, predictable schedule really helped Dr. McHugh train and plan time off for this special trip.

"I am happy that I have the kind of job where I can work hard and also have time to ride my bike," Dr. McHugh said. An avid rider since his formative years in New York, Dr. McHugh began tackling ultra-long-distance fundraising rides after he moved to California. The **Tour de Force** is his longest ride yet. OBHG shared photos and regular updates from Dr. McHugh on his progress via email and social media.



The Power of the Peloton

"There really are three types of challenges in any ride," he said. "Environment (climate, hills, wind), mind, and body. Of course, we can't change the environment, but we have a chance at the mind and body."

The first two stages along the coast of Normandy were enjoyable and not too tough, he noted. He spent the first night resting thoughtfully near historic Utah Beach. He knew the mountainous terrain ahead would be daunting.

"I weigh much more than most cyclists, so hills are a challenge," Dr. McHugh explained. "There is no substitute for the peloton in getting us through challenges. The pros form very formal teams, but even we amateurs break into small groups. In your group, each of us is focused on rotating positions in the peloton, taking 10-minute stints as leader or follower. ... The overriding theme is to follow the wheel inches in front of you and take responsibility for the rider inches behind you. From the outside, one might see hours of climbing mountains. Yet from the inside, when we break it down like this, we are counting the mere minutes in each role and focusing on our responsibility in that role. That gets us over the challenge."

During two legs of the ride, young beneficiaries rode part of the way with the riders and helped race staff work the feeding stations. They reveled in the opportunity to meet the riders, pose for pictures, and share experiences.

"Our goal as obstetricians is to help every child enter the world as (healthy) as possible," Dr. McHugh said. It is wonderful to maintain that commitment to these young people by supporting the charity."



The Big Five-O

Dr. McHugh celebrated his landmark 50th birthday July 5 during Stage 10 with a rest day in the tiny alpine principality of Andorra.

He noted that the most breathtaking mountain stage was crossing the crest of the Pyrenees from Andorra back into France. "Even in summer, there are still rocky snow-capped peaks well above the timberline, and the mountains are forested in lush green," he said. "The villages go back centuries, and the descents vary from quick turns on narrow cobbled streets to open vistas of pastures populated by cows and goats that appear content even with the endless chime of their bells."

Across every mile, people along the route enthusiastically supported the riders.

"The cycling culture of France, especially at Tour de France time, is amazing," Dr. McHugh said. "I toted my bike through Paris on the Metro, and Parisians helped me at every turn. On the roads, the cars give us a light 'toot-toot,' not just to keep us safe but also to cheer us on. The farms of Normandy were decorated with hay bales topped with bicycles and scarecrows dressed as cyclists!"

Dr. McHugh found the overall TDF experience exhilarating. The superlative journey concluded as the jubilant cyclists arrived on the Champs Elysées in Paris on July 17.

The True Meaning of Sacrifice

On his very first shift back at the hospital, during morning rounds, Dr. McHugh met a woman who was confined to a hospital bed for weeks because of pre-term labor. Their conversation led to a revelation of sorts.

"I started by talking with her about how much healthier her child could be if we can prolong her pregnancy and how this investment of her days and weeks will be a benefit to her and her family," he recalled. "Then I stepped back and thought about sacrifice, not in weeks or days but in how we truly experience it – minute by minute. I reflected on my recent journey, the long rides, the climbing, how in the moment, one could never really think about the big picture or you'd just get off the bike and stop. I'll never be pregnant. I'll never have to worry if what I do will affect my child's life forever. But maybe I could try to understand how one has to reframe sacrifice – to logically understand the value. ... We started talking about reading, about movies, about exercises she could do, and she began to smile and started to sketch out her day. My hope is that maybe the days, hours, and minutes doing my turns on the peloton can help me understand the days, hours, and minutes she is sacrificing for her family."

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