

THE PLAIN DEALER

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How this story was done

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Plain Dealer medical writer Diana Keough spent nearly 11 months reporting and writing the four-part series "At What Cost?"

The story began in Olmsted Falls and Amherst last November, when Keough met the Bihn and Markowich families before they took their daughters to Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C. Over the next eight months, Keough and Plain Dealer photographer John Kuntz visited the families and physicians at Duke five times to chronicle the transplants and their impact on the girls and their families. When Keough was not in North Carolina, she talked with the families regularly and continued her reporting when they returned home in August.

Keough reviewed studies and interviewed dozens of scientists and medical specialists.

In today's story, Keough was with Julie Bihn in Dakota's hospital room at Duke in March when Dakota had an unexplained rash. Other scenes and dialogue were re-created through interviews with everyone who was present. The exception was the Bihns' first meetings with Dr. Maria Escolar and Dr. Joanne Kurtzberg. Those were recounted from the Bihns' perspective, as the story notes. In later interviews with Keough, Escolar explained Dakota's prognosis and Kurtzberg explained the procedure in similar terms.

For additional documentation and links, go to cleveland.com/taysachs.