



Magician Michael Turco was about to leave for a tour with *Masters of Illusion* when he was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia.

Magic Man

Michael Turco dares to do the seemingly impossible in his bold magic acts. When he was diagnosed with leukemia, he needed a cancer care team that would do the same.

Michael Turco is a magician. He's levitated forks and other cutlery. He's made objects and people disappear. And he himself has escaped straitjackets and locked chests. But his most impressive feat? "Beating cancer," the 37-year-old says.

Since he was a young boy, all Michael wanted to do was perform magic. After graduating from college in New Jersey, where he was born and raised, he pursued magic full-time and was making a successful career: performing in casinos in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, appearing on TV programs such as *America's Got Talent* and touring all over the world with magic shows such as *Masters of Illusion*.



One of Michael's famed grand illusions involves levitating an assistant in the air.

While traveling between Los Angeles and Las Vegas late in 2016, his gums bled after brushing his teeth—not that little bit of blood that sometimes happens as you're brushing or flossing, but continual bleeding that needed blotting with a tissue.

A Shocking Diagnosis

Michael saw a dentist. Nothing out of the ordinary was discovered, but a few weeks later, when his gums began bleeding again, he saw another dentist who referred him to an oral surgeon, who recommended blood work.

On the day he had his blood drawn, the test results were the last thing on his mind. He and then-girlfriend, Nicole (now his wife), were getting ready to leave on tour with *Masters of Illusion*, and they were moving into a new apartment.

When Michael woke up early on the morning they were scheduled to leave, he noticed he'd missed more than a dozen calls and text messages from the oral surgeon. He called the surgeon, who informed him his test results showed a dangerously low platelet level. With the risk of internal bleeding high, he needed to get to an emergency department immediately.

At the ED, Michael told his medical team to do whatever they needed to, but he had to leave by 9 a.m. for his 11 a.m. flight. "They looked at me and said, 'I'm sorry, Michael,'" he recalls. "'You can't be traveling.'"

It was a shock to hear, but not nearly as shocking as when he was moved from the ED to the oncology department and diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). ALL is a type of blood cancer that causes an overproduction of lymphocytes, a kind of white blood cell, and is more common in children than adults. As Michael quickly learned, his bleeding gums were a sign of leukemia—and he was incredibly astute to pay attention to that symptom.

Back Home for Care

Given his diagnosis, a family friend recommended he seek treatment at the **John Theurer Cancer Center at Hackensack University Medical Center**, which was close to his family in New Jersey. "I wanted to travel back east not only to go to Hackensack, but also to be with my family,"

Early Signs of Adult Leukemia

Michael's type of leukemia is rare in adults, but leukemia is not. According to the National Institutes of Health's National Cancer Center, leukemia is the 10th most commonly diagnosed cancer in the U.S. Discover the early signs of adult leukemia at [HMHforU.org/LeukemiaSigns](https://www.hmhforu.org/LeukemiaSigns).

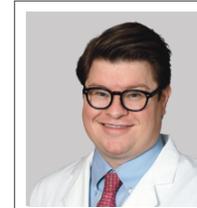
Michael says. "It was an important thing when going through these treatments to be close to them."

He went straight from the airport to Hackensack, where his medical team, including **Jamie Koprivnikar, M.D.**, a leukemia expert from the cancer center, was waiting for him.

Michael's test results and medical record had been forwarded to the medical team, Dr. Koprivnikar says, so they had some idea of what needed to be done to hit the ground running.

Within an hour of his arrival, Michael and his family worked with Dr. Koprivnikar to answer questions and start to put a plan together. Dr. Koprivnikar also ordered new tests to confirm what the prior tests had found.

Because Michael was so young, another issue to consider that usually doesn't come up with adult leukemia patients (the median age of an adult leukemia patient is 67) was arranging for sperm banking before the start of his chemotherapy. "We needed to talk to him about the possibility that chemotherapy could make him infertile," Dr. Koprivnikar says. "It's something that young people with cancer have to deal with on top of everything else."

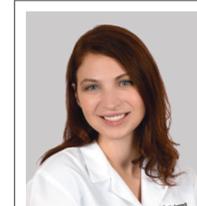


James McCloskey, M.D.

Board certified in hematology and medical oncology

551-996-5855

Hackensack



Jamie Koprivnikar, M.D.

Board certified in hematology and medical oncology

551-996-5855

Hackensack

A Second Family

With sperm banking arranged and some more testing completed, Michael's treatment got underway. After a month, he was tested to see how well the treatment was working and to continue to tailor the treatment to increase his chances of eliminating the cancer, says **James McCloskey, M.D.**, another leukemia specialist who was part of Michael's care team. "Fortunately, in Michael's case, he had a very quick and robust response to treatment," Dr. McCloskey says.

Today, Michael is winding down the final phases of treatment. He's back to work full-time, arranging his touring schedule around his once-a-month maintenance treatments. "I miss going to the cancer center once a week," he says. "You just feel so safe. They're all there to support you. They become a second family to you." 🌟

GO ONLINE

Learn more about the **John Theurer Cancer Center**, which has the largest leukemia program in New Jersey, at [HMHforU.org/JTCC](https://www.hmhforu.org/JTCC).