Chordoma is a one-in-a million disease that does not discriminate. It strikes those of all ages, at different spots along the spinal column. It is a rare form of cancer that affects the lives of 300 people each year. Josh, a junior in college, has been diagnosed with this devastating cancer. He is currently working with Dr. Michael Kelly in his lab at Duke University to try and determine the underlying genetic mechanisms that make the “normal” cells misfire.

After working in the lab for some time Josh and Kelly come to a realization. The rate at which their progress is going is meaningless unless they can find some way for all the neurosurgeons, orthopedic surgeons, and others that have experience removing and have attempted to treat chordoma to work as one. They need a cumulative database of the disparate patients and doctors treating chordoma to organize a clinical trial. The formation of a “BioBank” is currently underway to provide a means of collecting tumor material and shipping the most promising cell lines to researchers around the world that need them.

Josh has already recruited half-dozen labs to aid in his efforts to finding a cure for chordoma. These labs cover the fields of radiology, oncology, genetics, and many more. A lot more labs are also willing to aid in the chordoma effort but are merely waiting on the cell lines they need to commence testing. The research team hopes to one day be able
to understand the evolving hypothesis of cancer itself. They are able to see the variations between cancers in molecular terms, but not based on where they occur in the body. If they were able to determine how genetics comes into play in terms of turning on and off cancerous cells at different parts of the body then their research could be more broadly used for other types of cancer as well.

I admire Josh. If I was in the same situation that Josh is currently in I don’t know if I could be as strong as he is. He is taking an active part in trying to find a cure for his own cancer and that is amazing in itself. All around everything that Josh has accomplished—the undergoing creation of a “BioBank,” the bringing together the multitude of doctors in the various fields of science to work together as one, and his continued efforts to raise money for the chordoma effort is honorable. He makes us all realize that we can all be doing more in the effort to find a cure for cancer.