

## JUST ONE BREATH: Valley Fever forces police captain to give up his badge

Kellie Schmitt Reporting on Health Collaborative

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When Archie Scott came down with valley fever, he was 52, extremely fit and a captain in the Bakersfield Police Department.

One day in 2007, he started feeling feverish and lethargic with joint aches. He went to his physician, but the diagnosis was inconclusive. Weeks later, when he still had a fever, he went to a neurologist for additional testing.

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Valley fever wears many masks. This makes it hard for the people who suffer from the disease to recognize the symptoms. More importantly, the clinicians trying to diagnose them often mistake Valley Fever for bacterial infections, tuberculosis, even cancer. They prescribe the wrong drugs or perform the wrong procedures, allowing the disease to devastate a person's body.

To help people understand the faces of valley Fever, reporters with the Reporting on Health Collaborative are gathering stories about patients and their families. If you would like to tell us your story, write [valleyfever@reportingonhealth.org](mailto:valleyfever@reportingonhealth.org) or call 748-3142 to leave us a voice message

We didn't know what we were dealing with," Scott said. An MRI revealed an infection in his lower spine. Scott went to a local hospital's emergency room, where he was quickly admitted.

The next thing Scott remembers is waking up in the intensive care unit of San Joaquin Community Hospital. For nearly a month, doctors kept Scott heavily sedated and mechanical ventilation did most of his breathing for him. Valley fever had taken over his lungs.

That lost month would be a sign of how Valley Fever would end Scott's career and change his life.

Doctors were surprised that Scott recovered enough to leave the hospital. They told him that during his month under sedation, his survival chances had been minimal. After he woke up, though, his battle with Valley Fever continued. The fungus invaded his bones and spread to his skin, requiring multiple surgeries to mitigate the damage. He was put on regular intravenous treatments of Amphotericin B, an anti-fungal medicine. "He had cocci everywhere," explained his Bakersfield physician, **Dr. Navin Amin.**

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During the five months Scott spent at San Joaquin Community Hospital, he began to think of the staff as family. They even allowed him to wear his own sweatpants and T-shirts instead of typical hospital garb.

"People would say, 'Are you a patient?'" he recalled. "I said, 'I sort of live here.' That was my home."

When he finally returned to his real home, all of his routines had to be rearranged. No longer the police captain getting up early, working out, and then reporting to duty, Scott was now a full-time patient.

"Having valley fever is like having an airborne cancer," Scott said. Over six months, he lost more than 90 pounds. He continued to take Amphotericin B, which required him to make regular trips to a clinic for IV infusions of the drug. The side effects were debilitating, causing his body to convulse into excruciating cramps. More ominously, the drug is known to cause renal failure.

Amin said Scott's case represented the most Amphotericin B he'd ever prescribed to a patient in his career. "This broke all the records," he said.

As Scott sat in the infusion lab getting his treatments, he'd often meet other valley fever patients, some with stories even more devastating than his own. There was the 17-year-old girl who fought and fought but eventually succumbed to the disease. He made another friend of a man who retired to Bakersfield only to contract valley fever.

"He spent his retirement in infusion clinics," Scott said.

Throughout his fight with valley fever, Scott was struck by the lack of public awareness. Scott spent his life in Kern County -- a disease hot spot -- but the effects of the fever were eye-opening to him, too.

Two years after contracting valley fever, Scott retired from the police department, forced to cut short his career. He'll be on medication for the rest of his life. And he struggles to do the activities he once loved, even fishing.

But Scott says he's grateful to have survived to be around for his children and grandchildren. And he's appreciative of the excellent medical care he has found in Kern County, where so many of the disease specialists can be found.

"We just do it one appointment at a time," he said, "hoping to keep things at bay."