

St. Alexius staff embraces immigrant felled by illness

Via
Values
in
Action

COMPASSION

DIGNITY OF
THE PERSON

CARE OF
THE POOR

HOLISM

PARTNERSHIP

Most staff members at St. Alexius Medical Center know Gregorio Villafan like you know a relative, friend or neighbor whom you often see.

Until recently, Villafan, spent six to eight months a year at the Hoffman Estates, Ill., hospital, receiving charity care for renal failure, diabetes, high blood pressure, depression and a stroke.

"It's been a team effort," says Father Domingo Hurtado-Badillo, a hospital chaplain who befriended and translated for Villafan, an illegal immigrant from Mexico who first was admitted to St. Alexius in 2002.

"This patient has been in every unit in the hospital. Every social worker and case manager has invested so many hours to take care of him. This is a real example of the Alexian values that each one of our employees in each unit – every nurse and patient-care technician, every physical therapist and occupation-

al therapist – has been taking care of this young man. Many of our physicians know him very well. Everybody has been very kind and willing to help him."

Villafan was felled by renal failure after working and living independently in the United States for more than 10 years. "He became sick and lost everything," Father Domingo says. Villafan turned for help to two of his brothers in the Chicago area. He would alternate stays between their homes, but the brothers and their wives worked during the day, and Villafan did not receive the care he needed. "He would stay with his brothers for two weeks, get very sick, stay at the hospital for two weeks, get better and go back to his brothers, and the cycle would begin again," Father Domingo says.

Villafan, who needs regular dialysis treatments, insulin injections and medications for high blood pressure and depression, eventually wore out his welcome

with his brothers and began staying with friends between visits to the hospital.

Concerned about Villafan's well-being and safety, Father Domingo and hospital case managers and social workers began exploring long-term-care options. Father Domingo contacted a friend, Father Guadalupe Jimenez, a Mexico City pastor whose parish operates a nursing home, and Father Guadalupe arranged for Villafan to stay at the nursing home.

The hospital's administration, which previously had approved Father Domingo's charity-care request for Villafan, allocated \$15,000 through the Alexian Brothers Health System Foundation to cover the cost of continuing dialysis treatments for Villafan at the nursing home. The hospital also covered the cost of traveling to Mexico for Villafan and Father Domingo, who received time off to accompany the patient to Mexico City in September.

Although Villafan's inability to comply with doctors' orders between hospital stays has left him in end-stage renal failure, he will enjoy a good quality of life and could increase his chances of living longer if he follows medical advice and receives the necessary care at the nursing home, Father Domingo says.

Villafan was sad to leave the hospital but was grateful for the care he received, Father Domingo says. "When I told him everything that we were going to do for him, he got so emotional that he cried," Father Domingo says. "My hope is that by being in a place where his language is spoken, where he will eat Mexican food, where he will relate with more people and will have everything he needs, that he will get less depressed and will get a little better."



Gregorio Villafan (second from left) visits with St. Alexius Medical Center staff members who cared for him. They include (left to right): Father Domingo Hurtado-Badillo, Chaplain; Alicia Sandoval, R.N.; Lonnie Hicks, Director of Social Services; Sheila Evans, Case Manager; and Caren Champer, Social Worker.