

HPMC's Grateful Patient

For nearly 20 years, 66-year-old Ramiro Coyt struggled with an undiagnosed heart condition, which greatly diminished his quality of life. He was hospitalized in May 2015 with congestive heart failure, the result of leaky heart valves. On May 28, Ramiro was transferred from a small Los Angeles-area hospital to Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center (HPMC), where he would undergo surgery to replace both his aortic and mitral valves.

Due to his deteriorating health, the surgery was fraught with risk. He was initially told that without the surgery, he would die within a year and even if he did have the surgery, he probably still wouldn't make it much past that. Ramiro wanted to live. His family — wife Yolanda, daughters Elena and Ana, and Ana's husband Rick — wanted him to live. They felt that surgery offered the best hope. Little could anyone foresee the events that would unfold over the next six months.

Despite the complexity of the case, cardiothoracic surgeon Alexander Marmureanu, MD, was willing to perform Ramiro's double heart valve replacement. The grueling surgery took 10 hours to complete.

The surgery was successful but Ramiro's struggle was just beginning. His condition deteriorated following the surgery and by the fourth day, he stopped responding. Over the course of his nearly three-month stay, he would suffer multiple organ failure, sepsis, a collapsed lung, pneumonia, and myriad other life-threatening conditions. Three times during his hospitalization, he went into cardiac arrest.

Prior to the surgery, Ramiro told his family, "You need to make sure I am still here because I need to be there for you." His wife and children never left his side during his hospitalization, staying with him around the clock to help fulfill his wish.

Ramiro was placed in a medically induced coma for two months, while machines worked to keep his body alive. A ventilator breathed for him, dialysis filtered toxins from his blood, and a feeding tube provided him with nutrition. "It was like going to sleep and waking up in a nightmare that wouldn't end," recalled Elena. "It just went on and on and on."

Despite each set back, Ramiro never gave up, his family never gave up, and the physicians and staff of HPMC never gave up. They faced each new medical crisis as it came, doggedly determined to see Ramiro through it.

"It is something I have never seen before at this level," marveled Debbie McNeal, the occupational therapist who worked with Ramiro during his stay. "This is just the most wonderful story of all stories. The caring went viral throughout the hospital in an effort to make sure he was well taken care of."

As the physicians and staff banded together to save Ramiro, they became more than hospital employees to the Coyts. They became their family. There were doctors who prayed with them and doctors who availed themselves to the family day and night. His caretakers worked tirelessly to ensure Ramiro pulled through and his family received support. In an extraordinary display of compassion, Maria Martin, a member of the hospital's Housekeeping department, let the family take showers at her nearby home and brought them home-cooked meals.

Elena and her family are deeply touched by the outpouring of caring and compassion displayed by the hospital during their ordeal. "Where else are you going to find staff like that?" Elena asked.

By mid-August 2015, Ramiro was finally well enough to be transferred to a rehabilitation hospital. There he would continue his recovery and relearn to walk, talk, eat, and breath on his own. He finally returned home November 3, 2015, six long months after his odyssey began.

Ramiro's recovery has been nothing short of spectacular. He looks like the picture of health — far removed from his days confined to a bed and tethered to machines. He feels better than he has in many, many years.

On a recent visit to the hospital, it was clear just how much Ramiro and his family meant to the hospital and how invested they were in his wellbeing. As they made their rounds through the departments where Ramiro received care, there were a few tears and a lot of hugs. Everyone expressed their amazement and delight at how well Ramiro, their miracle patient, had recovered.

"Look at how well he looks," beamed Debbie. "He just looks so good. I can't stop smiling."

Dr. Marmureanu is equally pleased with Ramiro's recovery and gives credit to the team effort. "Everyone did a great job. It was a difficult case but nobody wanted to give up," he said.

The Coyts are eternally grateful to each and every physician and staff member who cared for Ramiro and the family and who never abandoned them in their time of need.

"There is no amount of money that can repay the hospital for what they did to keep my father alive," said Elena. "We want to thank them. They never, ever gave up on my father. He would not be here today if it wasn't for them."