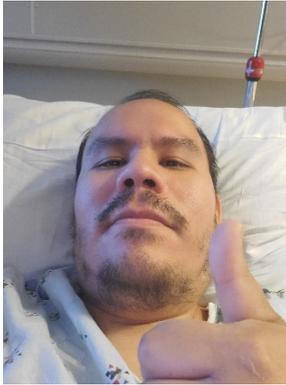


“Kaiser Permanente Saved My Life”

Torrance Resident Shares Story of Covid-19 Ventilator Experience



Diego Romani recovers at Kaiser Permanente South Bay Medical Center

“If I had not received the care that I did, I wouldn’t be talking to you right now,” says Torrance resident Diego Romani, speaking by phone from his hospital bed at Kaiser Permanente South Bay Medical Center.

Diego had noticed symptoms of a cough and fever the evening of March 17. When the symptoms kept getting worse, even after taking antibiotics for a few days, Diego was hospitalized for complications related to Covid-19.

“After the test came back saying I had Covid-19, I was scared and nervous,” says Diego. “This is a very serious illness – it’s not a game. I just couldn’t wrap my head around how I got it because I thought I had been taking extra precautions.”

Admitted to the Intensive Care Unit, Diego was given medication to manage his pain, treat his cough, and prevent blood clots. But, when his oxygen levels continued to drop, he had to be intubated on a ventilator for 9 days.

“Putting a patient on a ventilator is not something we take lightly because it can be an uncomfortable experience for the patient,” says Edward Cheng, MD, a pulmonologist who cared for Diego in the ICU. “But Covid-19 was causing Diego’s body to work harder to breathe. As Diego became short of breath and his body was deprived of oxygen, intubating him on a ventilator became necessary to save his life.”

Most patients who are put on a ventilator are given a sedative to make the experience easier to tolerate. Younger patients are usually able to metabolize the sedative more quickly than older patients, something that proved true for 34-year-old Diego.

Dr. Cheng notes, “Despite being sedated, Diego was fairly responsive and awake. It can be frustrating for patients to be aware that they are on a ventilator, so I reached out to Diego’s family every couple days and passed along their messages of motivation to him. They would tell him to ‘keep on fighting,’ and I think it helped him to have that family support.”

After 9 days, Diego’s oxygen levels started improving and he began to depend less on the ventilator machine to breathe. Those were the signs doctors were waiting for. They started weaning trials to see if Diego’s body would breathe on its own again. The trials were a success, and Diego was approved to be extubated from the ventilator on April 2.

“The day before Diego was extubated, we were able to facilitate a video chat with his mom and brother,” recalls Dr. Cheng. “Even though Diego still couldn’t speak, he was alert enough to know what was going on, and I think it gave him extra motivation to push through. It was nice to see that connection.”

Diego says, “Once they told me I could get out of the ICU, that gave me a lot of hope. Now I am able to walk and move around a little. I’m slowly getting my strength back in my legs.” He was discharged home from the hospital on April 8 and acknowledges that he will have to undergo physical rehab to reach a full recovery.

A Kaiser Permanente member for 7 years, Diego says, “Kaiser Permanente saved my life. Getting the care I needed has been great, and I have no complaints. Everyone here has been wonderful. Whenever I needed anything, they came and helped me.”