

Support grows to help East Bay immigrant get kidney transplant

Contra Costa Times (California)

February 3, 2012 Friday

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Section: BREAKING; My Town; Western Contra Costa; Oakland-Berkeley; Contra Costa; News; Local

Length: 653 words

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Body

An effort to save the life of an Oakland father who was denied an organ **transplant** because of his immigration status has gained a legion of supporters across the country.

Jesus Navarro now has a website, an online petition with thousands of supporters, several lawyers and a laundry list of groups organizing on his behalf.

The soft-spoken 35-year-old has a willing donor in his wife and private insurance to pay for a **kidney transplant**. But UC San Francisco Medical Center refuses to perform the operation because administrators can't be sure he will be able to afford follow-up care given his status as an illegal **immigrant**.

Support has poured in for Navarro since this newspaper published his story Tuesday, and his allies are trying to set up a meeting with the UC administrators who turned him down.

"I've spent maybe 10 percent of my time doing my job in the past few days," said Donald Kagan, a partner in a Berkeley technology firm who has become Navarro's chief advocate.

Kagan received a **kidney transplant** himself at UCSF in 2010. His donor was a Nicaraguan **immigrant** who came to this country illegally and later gained citizenship.

"I really know the process because I've lived it," said Kagan, who notes that he was never asked about his immigration status.

On Thursday, Change.org posted a petition asking UC administrators and California's U.S. senators to **help** save Navarro's life. The national website is best known for pressuring Bank of America to drop its debit-card fee plan.

A day later, nearly 3,000 people had signed on and left messages of **support** for the family.

UC medical students are also trying to arrange a meeting with administrators.

"As a medical student, I'm committed to human rights and health care for all of my patients, regardless of immigration status," said first-year medical student Josh Connor.

State lawmakers and Oakland Councilman Ignacio De La Fuente have also joined the cause.

Several physician organizations, including the California Nurses Association, have signed a separate letter demanding that UC perform the **transplant** immediately.

Professors from universities such as Stanford, UC Davis and UCSF have also endorsed the letter.

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The signatories demand that UCSF pay for Navarro's post-surgery care if necessary.

"Your actions have inexcusably delayed his treatment," the letter states.

Navarro waited on a **kidney transplant** list for years. When he moved to the top of the list this year, administrators discovered his illegal status and refused to perform the **transplant**. His wife was found to be a match, but administrators still declined, fearing that he might not be able to pay for the follow-up care he would need for the rest of his life.

In January, Navarro was caught in an immigration audit and lost his job of 14 years at Berkeley's Pacific Steel. But his supporters say they have arranged to have him keep his private insurance.

At a meeting in Kagan's Berkeley conference room Friday evening, representatives from organizations such as the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and the **Bay** Area's Interfaith Coalition met to talk strategy.

Navarro sat in a baseball cap holding his 3-year-old daughter and occasionally chiming in as the conversation moved in and out of Spanish.

Afterward, he explained why it had never occurred to him to reach out for **help**.

"I thought no one would want to pay attention to me," he said. "I figured they would tell me to go away."

Navarro's supporters expect to hear back from UCSF administrators Monday about a meeting time. They are hoping the clinic reverses its decision.

But Navarro's insurance will also cover the operation if he has it at UC Davis, and a **transplant** physician in Ohio has taken up the case.

Contact Hannah Dreier at 510-262-2787. Follow her at [Twitter.com/hannahdreier](https://twitter.com/hannahdreier) .HOW TO **HELP**

Sign the online petition: www.chn.ge/z8eGS2

Visit Navarro's website: www.transplant4jesus.com

Reach out to the family:help@transplant4jesus.com

Graphic

Jesus Navarro, of Oakland, right, and his daughter Karen Jaquelin, 3, listen to Rev. Deborah Lee, left, of Oakland, and with the Interfaith Coalition for **Immigrant** Rights, (CLUE) as they attend a meeting with community members at Alternative Technologies in Berkeley, Calif. on Friday, Feb. 3, 2012. Navarro needs a **kidney transplant** but was denied the operation because of his legal status. (Jane Tyska/Staff)

Jesus Navarro, 37, an undocumented alien in need of a **kidney transplant**, waits at a local coffee shop with his three-year-old daughter Karen-Jacquelyn before his appointment at a dialysis facility in Oakland, Calif., Thursday, Jan. 5, 2012. (D. Ross Cameron/Staff)

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

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Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: IMMIGRATION (91%); ***TRANSPLANT*** SURGERY (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (89%); BIOETHICS (89%); IMMIGRATION LAW (89%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (89%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); PETITIONS (77%); SURGERY & TRANSPLANTATION (76%); ILLEGAL ***IMMIGRANTS*** (73%); PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS (71%); NURSES & NURSING (70%); US CONGRESS (69%); DISMISSALS (67%); STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (67%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (64%); GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS (62%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (62%); HUMAN RIGHTS (50%)

Company: BANK OF AMERICA CORP (57%)

Ticker: BAC (NYSE) (57%); BAC (LSE) (57%); 8648 (TSE) (57%)

Industry: HEALTH CARE (89%); PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS (71%); NURSES & NURSING (70%); GRADUATE & PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS (62%); COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS (62%)

Geographic: SAN FRANCISCO, CA, USA (79%); OAKLAND, CA, USA (73%); CALIFORNIA, USA (92%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: November 15, 2012