

Man in coma racks huge hospital bills

Written by Administrator
Saturday, 13 August 2011 12:20



JOSE ELMER LEONARDO CASTRO

DUBAI — A Filipino in coma for nearly three months following a brain hemorrhage lies in limbo at a private hospital with his post-surgery care bills reaching a massive Dh210,000.

Jose Elmer Leonardo Castro, 46, who worked as a heavy equipment painter at Arcom, was admitted to Cedars Jebel Ali International Hospital on May 12 after he suffered an intra-cerebral hemorrhage as he was returning to his accommodation inside the free zone after work.

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Doctors performed a life-saving neurosurgical intervention after Castro was wheeled into the hospital's emergency ward.

He was then immediately transferred to another private hospital in Sharjah for decompression craniotomy and evacuation of the hemorrhage and was kept in the ICU on artificial ventilation.

While his insurance company paid for the emergency treatment and surgery, they declined to pay for the treatment at the Sharjah hospital as they [insurer] did not have a contract with the hospital.

Back to Cedars

On May 24, Castro was transferred back to Cedars, with feeding done through a tube.

On June 7, a gastric feeding fistula was established and on June 11 he was taken off the tube and has since been breathing on his own.

With post-operative care not covered by his insurer, Castro has run up a bill of Dh210,000.

His wife Annette, a street food vendor and part-time dressmaker in San Fernando, Philippines, told XPRESS over phone it is "impossible" for them to pay the Dh210,000 in hospital bills that her husband has racked up till this week.

"My husband was our main breadwinner," she said.

"He used to send us between 12,000 pesos and 13,000 pesos (about Dh1,100 per month), most of which went towards our children's expenses and education."

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She said her three children now depend on charity to go to school.

While Castro is now reacting to speech, he is only able to display minimum movement by squeezing someone's hand and nodding.

His doctors said further rehabilitation may take months, if not years.

Amilbahar Amilasan, a Philippine Consulate official in Dubai, said they are working on Castro's case and will facilitate his repatriation as he is a member of the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), but said that the bill is "huge" and won't be fully covered by the agency.

"We have made requests to OWWA and other charities for financial help to settle his bills," said Amilasan.

Dr. Guenther Kieninger, head, Department of Surgery, and medical director of Cedars, said Castro is now fit to travel but needs a nurse to accompany him during flight.

"We believe that being with his family will be good for his continuous recovery," said Dr. Kieninger.