

Archbishop helps Daniela get eye surgery

LOS ANGELES—Four years ago, a traumatic car accident left 10-year-old Daniela Duarte blind in her left eye with paralysis of her right eyelids. Recently, Archbishop John J. Myers assisted Daniela and entrusted her care into the hands of Saint Vincent Medical Center. There, ophthalmic plastic surgeon Robert Levine, M.D., performed a rare operation to successfully restore her eyesight.

"I heard a call from Our Lord, a call asking me to do all I could to help," Archbishop Myers said. "I am grateful to Dr. Turbin and the staff at Saint Vincent Medical Center. They heard the call as well." Dr. Roger Turbin is an ophthalmologist at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and was the referring physician on the case.

Archbishop Myers took on Daniela's case by personally contacting the Daughters of Charity, Province of the West, whose provincialate is located in Los Altos Hills, CA. As founders of the Daughters of Charity Health System and sponsor of Saint Vincent Medical Center, the Daughters of Charity joined the archbishop in his quest to bring Daniela cross-country for this highly specialized microsurgical operation.

"On the day she left for Los Angeles, Daniela and her mother visited with me," Archbishop Myers said. "Together, we prayed and talked of our hope for her. It isn't always fashionable to talk about miracles these days, but thanks to everyone from the doctors and nurses in Los Angeles and Newark, to the pilot and crew of the angel flight, Daniela has a favorable future."

Daniela underwent four hours of surgery at Saint Vincent Medical Center on Feb. 1, an operation called "reanimation of the eyelid with a palpebral spring." Levine implanted a tiny spring in her upper eyelid and a "Medpor" plastic implant in her lower eyelid to keep it from sagging. The surgery will give her some ability to open her eye by giving upward spring in her upper lid, while keeping the bottom lid up to protect her cornea from dryness.

"I had to balance the opening and closing forces of the lid," explained Levine, who has performed about 2,000 of these surgeries over his career at Saint Vincent Medical Center and ambulatory surgery centers, mostly in conjunction with the House Clinic in Los Angeles, where patients with cranio-facial nerve loss come for sub-specialist care in removing brain tumors.

Earlier this month, for two days of post surgery, Daniela and her mother, Maria Fatima Moco, recuperated in the Seton Guest Center on campus at Saint Vincent Medical Center. Daniela's eye was still swollen, but she was in good spirits and talked with great anticipation about the upcoming birth of a niece or nephew. "And guess how many cats I have?" she asked with girlish enthusiasm.

Moco spoke in Spanish about how her daughter likes all her academic subjects and would like to go to Disneyland one day. Moco said she had complete confidence in Levine and Turbin. "I just want her to be able to see," Moco said, shedding some tears.

"This story offers a glimpse into our Mission at Daughters of Charity Health System," Cathy Fickes, Saint Vincent Medical Center president and chief executive officer said. "We provide quality, compassionate care to those in need. And when necessary, we join together with others near and far to make it happen."

(Editor's note: This article was obtained from Saint Vincent Medical Center by the archdiocesan Office of Communications.)



Advocate photo - Melissa McNally

Late last month Archbishop John J. Myers (right) met with Daniela Duarte (center) and Maria Fatima Moco, at his Newark residence, prior to their journey to the Los Angeles medical center. Daniela underwent four hours of surgery on Feb. 1. She and her mom reside in the Ironbound section of Newark.