

# California worker denied kidney transplant due to immigration status

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In a situation that highlights the backward character of immigration restraints, a 35-year-old California man, Jesus Navarro, was denied a kidney transplant because he is an undocumented immigrant.

For the past eight years Navarro has needed daily kidney dialysis, which he has undergone each evening while still working full-time at Berkeley's Pacific Steel Foundry. The life expectancy for dialysis patients is only six years.

Last spring, Navarro reached the top of the wait-list at University of California, San Francisco's transplant center. But in the final pre-surgery consultation, doctors discovered his immigration status and canceled the procedure.

Administrators at UCSF continued to refuse to allow the operation after Navarro's wife offered her own kidney for the operation, saying there is no guarantee he will receive adequate post-operative care due to the family's socioeconomic instability.

In a statement to the *Contra Costa Times*, UCSF Executive Director of Transplantation Reece Fawley said: "UCSF's policy for financial clearance requires candidates to present evidence of adequate and stable insurance coverage or other financial sources necessary to sustain follow-up care long after transplant surgery. Immigration status is among many factors taken into consideration."

Unlike many undocumented immigrants who are refused care, Navarro has private health insurance from his job. Navarro worked at the Pacific Steel Foundry for 14 years until he was caught up in an immigration

audit of the company last month.

Since taking office, President Obama has intensified the federal prosecution of immigrants, with a record 400,000 deportations last fiscal year. Although the administration claims to be targeting criminals, the government's own statistics show that the majority of those deported have committed no crime other than entering the country illegally, or misdemeanors like traffic violations.

According to the ACLU there are even numerous cases of women facing domestic violence being arrested and deported after seeking help from the police. Through cases like these and Navarro's, it is clear that the main target of anti-immigrant legislation is not violent criminals but foreign workers who have done nothing more notable than find a job and raise a family since coming to the country.

Navarro still has his private insurance for now, but if he cannot extend it he may be forced onto California's Medi-Cal health care system, which would compound his current difficulties. Medi-Cal has been a constant target for cuts by the state's Democratic governor, Jerry Brown.

Under Medi-Cal, Navarro's \$17,000 a month daily dialysis treatments would be covered, but the transplant and the \$20,000 a year immunosuppressive drugs that prevent organ rejection would not be. Without insurance it is unlikely that Navarro would be able to pay for the operation, regardless of immigration status.

Being unemployed is devastating, even without medical conditions. Navarro told a *Contra Costa Times*

reporter that rather than getting a life-saving transplant, his main concern right now was finding another job to take care of his wife and three-year-old daughter.

There is a concerted effort among right-wing elements to divide foreign and native-born workers by blaming high health care costs and budget shortfalls on undocumented immigrants. Paradoxically, the evidence shows a clear net benefit from illegal immigration for transplants. According to a 2008 study by the American Medical Association, undocumented immigrants donated 2.5 percent of organs and received fewer than 1 percent of them.



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