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Governor: Prayers prevailed

With a neck brace, Gov. Benigno R. Fitial lighted up the room when he first sat on his hospital bed after a critical four-hour operation. It was a poignant moment according to First Lady Josie, describing how the chief executive showed signs of fast recovery.



PACIFIC TIMES PHOTOS

By Ulysses Torres Sabuco
Pacific Times

Gov. Benigno R. Fitial's successful operation from a delicate and critical spinal problem — cervical stenosis — is a testament that God's wonders work even in the hands of medical experts.

He may be privileged to have been under the care of some of the nation's top surgeons, but for the governor, prayers from the family, friends and people back home helped him through the procedure.

"The power of prayers prevailed," said Fitial. "A lot of people prayed for me. And I am

very, very grateful to them. I can feel the prayers when I walked to the operating room. I was confident; I had no fear. God was on my side"

A day after he made it through the medical procedure in the hands of a five-man surgical team at the UCLA Medical Center headed by Dr. Jeffrey

Wang on Tuesday afternoon, the governor began his therapy. It was designed to correct his walking and sitting problems and regain his balance.

And it was the best gift for the high-spirited chief executive, who on Nov. 27 will turn 61.

The news of the governor's successful five-hour critical op-

eration reverberated across the Commonwealth, as residents patiently awaited its outcome.

The surgery had to be done to correct the compression — and collapse of his spinal cord.

"To all the people of the Commonwealth who prayed for

me in this ordeal here at UCLA, for the masses offered, I could not thank you enough. I thank the bishop and all the parishes. Me and my family are grateful to all of you," Fitial added.

The governor made special See **Governor** on page 6



Diabetes specialist Dr. Roger Lee checks on the governor.



Gov. Fitial explains the procedure he went through to lawyer-businessman Emmanuel I. Bernabe who visited him shortly after the surgery.



First Lady Josie Fitial assists the governor as he called Bishop Tomas Camacho following his back surgery.

Nurse raises the bar in philanthropy

By Aldwin Fajardo
Pacific Times

Mauro Sipin grew up not knowing how it feels like to have anything material that may be considered valuable—at least nothing fancier than three square

meals a day. Deep in his heart, though, he knew he was headed to something bigger than he could ever hope for.

Fast-forward to 2006, Sipin gets everything he needs for himself—and for the people around him, actually even those who are several time zones away.

A nurse by profession, Sipin is using his ability to earn more like a true philanthropist although the title is far from what he would like to be known for. He sets aside a big chunk of his bi-weekly paycheck for a non-profit organization he founded that helps indigent students in his hometown of Santiago, Ilocos Sur.

His organization—MV Sipin Foundation—also helps in the educational expenses of some children from financially-challenged families in Los Angeles, California.

"I have a special place in my heart for kids, especially for those who have to deal with poverty and the difficulties

attached to growing up poor because I see myself in them. I grew up in a situation wherein being able to eat three times a day was a privilege," he confides.

Sipin spent most of his childhood working in Ilocos farms to help his parents provide for their family of eight. He is the third to the eldest in a family of seven boys and a girl, raised by their parents who both barely finished grade school.

He would walk straight to the farm after school to work four hours a day on weekdays and whole day on weekends. He also walked tens of meters from their house to Santiago Elementary School where, despite the many hours he spent working in the farm, he graduated with honors.

"My parents were barely educated and because of that, they instilled among us the importance of education. They always told us that education, coupled by hard work, is the only way out of our impoverished situation," Sipin recalls.

He took his parents' advice

to heart and pursued higher learning even if it meant working odd jobs in construction sites and restaurants.

After finishing high school in Santiago, Sipin enrolled in a nursing program at the University of Santo Tomas in 1972. But the lack of financial resources forced him to stop after only two regular and one summer terms.

In 1973, he rolled his sleeves up and worked in a construction project at the EPZA Processing Zone in Mariveles, Bataan. Just as soon as he was able to save enough, he went back to nursing school in 1974 at the Arellano University.

He later trained as a waiter at the University of the Philippines' Economics Department and worked as a wait-staff at the Sulo Hotel in Quezon City in 1975, during which he transferred to the Medical City School of Nursing where he finally completed his nursing degree in 1978.

As soon as he passed the Philippines Board Examination for nurses in the same year, he

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Tests reveal acute upper spine problem

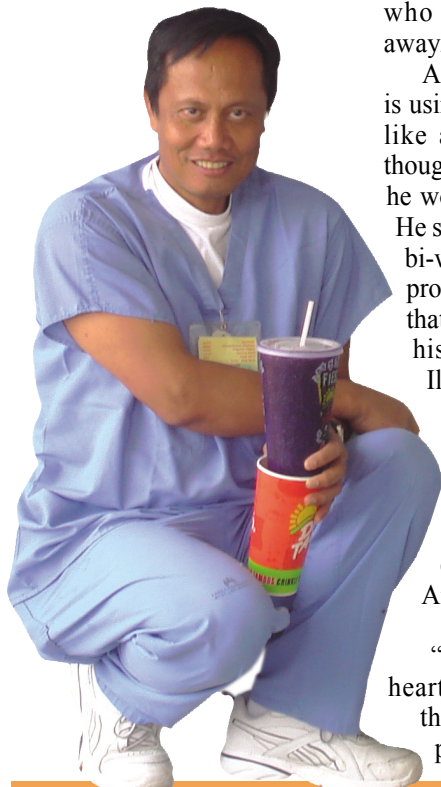
Gov. Benigno R. Fitial's lower back problem — a medical condition initially traced on lumbar stenosis as diagnosed by Philippine-based surgeons — is actually caused by a more serious spine problem on his back neck.

The medical condition is known as cervical stenosis or sometimes called cervical myelopathy.

Series of test performed on the chief executive at the Stanford University Medical Center, where he was first to be operated on upon his arrival on October 4 and before being transferred to UCLA Medical Center, revealed that the governor was suffering from cervical stenosis.

The chief of UCLA Medical Center's spine surgery for the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery reaffirmed the tests per-

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