

Dr. Wang, a young medical inventor

One would not pass without noticing the remarkable feat and successes of Jeffrey Wang in the field of medicine.

Wang, a Chinese-American, is known to his peers throughout the nation as the inventor of the artificial disk used during spine procedure. This was same disk that was inserted into Gov. Benigno R. Fitial's back neck to cure his cervical stenosis. This medical condition has rendered the chief executive unable to walk properly, slowing the once energetic chief executive.

But last Monday's successful surgery of the governor proved that Wang's invention works. The governor is back on his feet, literally able to walk and stand unaided.

"It is a remarkable achievement. No one has ever realized, especially for an individual robbed of his desire to be able to walk properly again, will be able to do so. Thank you to Dr. Wang," says a friend of the Fitials who was with the couple in Southern California where the procedure was performed.

As the chief of the Spine Surgery for the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Wang he is involved in the UCLA Comprehensive Spine Center and runs a busy basic science laboratory and a busy spine practice.



Jeffrey Wang

He was highly recommended among medical experts to perform on the governor's spine surgery. The governor will remain under the care of Wang for the next three weeks as he undergoes advanced therapy.

Wang, who completed his medical degree in 1991 from the University Of Pittsburgh School Of Medicine, brings with him varied clinical experiences including the honor of being a fellow of the Spine and Spinal Cord Injury program at the University Hospitals of Cleveland. He had his residency and internship at the UCLA School of Medicine — one of

the nation's top medical schools.

His clinical interests and expertise are unwarranted — and most sought-after. They include Ankylosing Spondylitis, artificial disk, BMP (Bone Morphogenic Protein), back surgery, Basilar Invagination, Bone Protein Implant, Cervical Spine, Complex Trauma, Craniocervical Junction, Decomp, Disk Degeneration, Disk Herniation, Endoscopic Spine Surgery, Facet Joint Syndrome, Fresh Trauma, Fusion (Botox, Epidural Inj.), Kyphoplasty/Vertebroplasty, Laminectomy, Laser, Lumbar Tumor, Micro Surgery, Minimally Invasive, Multi Trauma, Myelopathy, Neck Pain, Nerve, Tumor, Neuro Endoscopy, Non-union Trauma, Oncology, Pars Defect Of Lumbar Spine.

Pars Defect Repair, Pediatrics, Peripheral Nerve, Platybasia, Radiculopathy, Reopen Surgery, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Sciatica, Spinal Compression Fracture An, Spinal Cord Injury, Spinal Fusion, Spinal Infection, Spinal Instability, Spinal Surgery, Spinal Tumor, Spine, Spine Minimally Invasive, Sports Spine Injury Disorder, Stenosis, Synovial Cyst, Syringomyelia, Thoracic Spine And Disks, Trauma, Trochanteric Bursitis, Unstable Spine, and Vertebroplasty. — **UTS**

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formed at Stanford. An operation was immediately recommended on his back neck.

At exactly 8:30am on Monday (2:30am Saipan time) the governor underwent a four-hour surgery led by the surgical team of Dr. Jeffrey Wang. The governor's diabetes physician, Dr. Roger Lee, worked hand-in-hand with Wang.

"This is a rare spine problem that could lead to paralysis if not handled properly. As a matter of fact, I did not know that I have cervical stenosis; a compression of my nerves in the neck," the chief executive told Pacific Times in a long distance interview from Los Angeles where he is undergoing a 4-week therapy.

He added, "It was a very delicate procedure. Although, I was first diagnosed for lumbar stenosis, according to Dr. Wang, he will take care as soon as my neck is healed. But this is the most important operation: the cervical neck operation."

Wang recommended that the governor undergo a final surgical procedure on his lumbar stenosis soon.

Existing medical studies showed that the surgery performed to cure cervical stenosis can only be done in

the United States. Cervical stenosis is developed through degenerative changes were the joints can create tightening of the spinal canal. Over time, this process may lead to pinching the spinal cord and compromise the coordination of the extremities — symptoms that is prevalent in the governor's physical/walking condition.

Symptoms include heavy feeling in the legs, inability to walk at a brisk pace, deterioration in fine motor skills (such as handwriting or buttoning a shirt), intermittent shooting pains into the arms and legs (like an electrical shock) especially when bending their head forward (also known as Lermite's phenomenon), and arm pain or radiculopathy.

Accompanied by First Lady Josie, the governor left on Oct. 4 and brought with him the initial finds of Manila-based Dr. Martin Camara.

Fitial submitted himself to a series of what he termed "conservative treatments" in the Philippines, from Aug. 27 to Sept. 10. This was following the discovery that his lumbar stenosis is caused by a compression of his third and fourth spinal discs on his lower back.

Camara recommended that both

spinal discs of the governor be operated on immediately but the procedure has never been done in the Philippines before. He recommended that the operation be done in the US mainland.

Mrs. Fitial admitted that if the governor's lower back was to be operated on in the Philippines they had to be warned that there was only a "50-50 chance" of recovery.

"So I decided not to go with the surgery and decided to have it in the US and seek for a more thorough study," said Mrs. Fitial. It was then when a series of MRI and CT scan performed on the governor revealed that there was the acute spine problem was on his back neck.

At UCLA Medical Center, the governor's diabetes was stabilized as Wang inserted a plate between the governor's vertebra. It was done to create a bigger space to prevent the vertebra from squeezing the spinal cord.

The additional space between the vertebra and the cord will relieve the governor of the extreme pain he is suffering from. The vertebrae have calcified reducing its flexibility causing pain and numbness on his lower leg.

— **Ulysses Torres Sabuco**

Nurse from page 1

migrated to the United States and started working at the Long Beach Community Hospital in Long Beach, California.

Life in the US

Sipin passed the California Board Examination for nurses in 1979 and since then worked for Kaiser Permanente in Los Angeles, California where he has held various positions for over two decades now.

He also pursued higher education by taking up an Associate in Science program at the Long Beach City College and Bachelor of Science in Zoology minor in human physiology at the California State University.

"My parents placed strong emphasis on the value of education when I was growing up in Ilocos Sur and I absorbed that pretty well. Learning is a continuing process and you don't stop learning," Sipin says, adding that this conviction inspired him into founding a nonprofit organization that seeks to make education an attainable dream for children of poor parents.

Life as an immigrant in the US wasn't a bed of roses for Sipin. "I guess everybody has to hurdle some difficulties while starting in a new environment. It's just a matter of persevering and having your sight focused at thriving whatever it takes."

Possibly one of the most loyal nursing staff of Kaiser-LA, Sipin proved that a steady stone gathers the

moss. His loyalty with the hospital helped him climb the professional ladder from charge nurse to nursing supervisor whose annual paycheck is probably equivalent to—if not more than—Ilocos Sur's provincial budget.

Penny-pinching is undoubtedly not one of Sipin's characteristics, as he readily extended his arms to those needing help. He started his charity at home by helping relatives from sending nieces, nephews and cousins to school to coughing up their placement fees for overseas jobs and financing other's little business ventures.

As soon as he was done helping relatives, Sipin, in 2005, created the MV Sipin Foundation, which was responsible in the purchase and maintenance of two buses that ferry students for free from several pickup points near their houses to their respective schools in Santiago, Ilocos Sur.

"I know firsthand how hard it is to walk a kilometer or two to school. By the time you get to the school, you're already exhausted and your process of learning is somehow affected. So I thought a free public transport system specifically for schoolchildren would be helpful," he adds.

MV Sipin Foundation is also partly subsidizing the educational expenses of about 200 elementary and high school students in Santiago. His foundation supplements the

monthly salary of 18 daycare and 12 pre-school teachers with additional P1,000 a month. "I know that it's not too much of a help but I know they appreciate it. And I hope that it somehow inspires them to go on with their noble profession."

And they do. Sipin's mailbox is always filled with letters of thanks and appreciation from the daycare and pre-school teachers his foundation helps.

One of them, Lorie Balbin, wrote, "The additional allowance is a great help not just to our family but our students as well because it means extra money for the teaching materials we need. Knowing that we are appreciated for what we do inspires us more to give our very best in making sure our children get better education."

Santiago Mayor Josefino E. Miranda says Sipin is known in town for his generosity in extending assistance to people in dire need of help. "Aware of the incapability of the municipality to realize all its developmental thrusts, Mr. Sipin clearly manifested his passion to help the municipality through various contributions."

Sipin has donated seven water systems to various elementary schools in Santiago, a fire truck to the city government, blood pressure apparatus, stethoscopes and nebulizers to each of the 24 barrios in Santiago and its three health centers.

He funded the construction of a

Governor from page 1

mention to his surgical team, including Dr. Wang, Dr. Roger Lee, and Dr. Carlos Sandoval, among others.

He and First Lady Josie were humbled by the assistance and caring extended by their special friends in Northern California.

A month after Philippine-based doctors at the Asian Medical Center discovered that the chief executive had a major problem on his fourth and fifth spinal discs and would require immediate medical attention in the US mainland, the community came together. Masses were heard every Friday at various parishes, including San Jose Church — the governor's parish.

A group, Friends of Ben Fitial, held a fundraising event to help cough up the costly medical procedure.

At exactly 12:30pm on Monday and just as he was wheeled out from the operating room on the way to the recovery room, the governor phoned and personally thanked Chalan Kanoa Bishop Tomas Camacho for his prayers.

'All to Him'

While the governor is a survivor of at least four surgeries, Monday's procedure was a testament that God's unfailing love, according to First Lady Josie, in a separate interview.

Mrs. Fitial gave her all, never leaving the side of her husband.

The governor's elder sister, Gregoria Omar, joined the first lady in prayers as the governor went through the surgery. She flew from Saipan days before the operation to be with her brother.

"You could not imagine how happy and relieved we are of the successful operation. Prayers really helped us through it; it helped my husband to be stronger and not to fear anything," Mrs. Fitial said.

She added, "I surrendered everything to the Lord. I know that He will never fail us during this moment."

The couple was joined by their children, Cristina, 21, and Patrick, 18.

Aside from the Bishop, Mrs. Fitial immediately phoned close friends, relatives and government officials including acting governor Timothy P. Villagomez and Finance Secretary Eloy Inos.

On Capitol Hill, Villagomez and Inos broke the news to the members of the Strategic Economic Development Council, an organization composed of private and public sector representatives. It was welcomed with great relief and cheers.

Mrs. Fitial said the governor woke up early to prepare for his 5:30am admission. Pre-operation procedures have to be performed, which took three hours before the chief executive went under the knife at 8:30am.

At the chapel inside the USCLA Medical Center compound, Mrs. Fitial and Omar prayed.

The night before, the governor, the first lady, their two children, Omar and three close friends had a hearty dinner. The governor had a 24-ounce Kobe steak and a Merlot red

police outpost and donated cash for the town plaza improvement; he bought monobloc chairs for 11 schools in Santiago, and donated appliances such as refrigerators and water dispensers that are now in use at the municipal hall.

Early this year, the Office of the Municipal Social Welfare and Development in Santiago, Ilocos Sur adopted a resolution in recognition and appreciation of Sipin's "relentless efforts in responding to some of the needs of our constituents."

Sipin is happy that his constituents in Santiago appreciate the assistance he extends to them but noted that he doesn't help for the recognition, although he admitted that messages of appreciation inspire him to do more for those who need help.

"I feel blessed because God gave me more than what I asked for. I came from a poor family and the experiences I've had as a poor child are simply difficult to endure. I want to do what I can to make sure that the children in my hometown don't have to go through the same hardships.

wine.

Nearly 13 years ago, the governor made it through a similar critical procedure: tumor in the stomach.

Walking With Ease

For Mrs. Fitial, their children, the governor's sister and close friends, the first thing that came to mind was to memorialize the governor's first post-operation activity, which was to sit on the bed.

The governor gave a great smile and Mrs. Fitial stood right next to him. The governor was wearing a neck brace. There was photo opportunity.

Soon, the governor started to walk to exercise. He walked from one end of the hallway to the other — about 25 yards. At the end of the hallway, he was asked if he wanted to sit down. He said "no" and walked on.

The governor repeated the same process. It was the first sign of his immediate recovery and how receptive he was toward the actual therapy that was to begin shortly.

With a harsh voice, Fitial, acknowledged that he lost his unsteady gait and had started to walk with ease. He has been on high spirit, during and after the surgery.

"One of the very obvious symptoms is the loss of balance. It was gone. When I am walking or even when I am standing, I realized that I finally gain my balance back. My pain in my extremities and my toes had already disappeared. Although I have numbness of toes and feet because of my lumbar problem, but a big part of it is gone," Fitial said.

Dr. Wang will schedule the final procedure for the governor's lumbar stenosis — lower spine/ back — once the surgery to cure his cervical stenosis is completely healed. The healing process will take at least three months.

Ready to Work

During the post-operation, the governor could not hide his jovial feeling and relief. He did his usual musing and joking — and to friends, it was a sign that the governor is back and ready to work.

At one point, just as he was to be operated on and when the governor was told that his hair was to be shaved at the back of the neck because that is where the incision will be, the governor said, "That is ok for as long as the one who will cut my hair is a certified barber. I want everybody to touch my body to be certified."

Then another doctor came to inject a relaxing antidote, Demerol, for him to be at ease before the operation. With the effect almost instantaneous, the governor said, "Whoa, you must have given me a double shot, the kick was fast. I am flying" and raised his two hands in air and swayed it.

But for the governor, God has prepared him for a bigger and challenging task and no amount of obstacle can stand in his way. "I am ready to work. And I am very, very thankful to God for bringing me to this professional surgeon led by Dr. Wang, and to have a loving and supportive wife, children, brothers and sisters and friends here and back at home."

They deserve more and they will get more."

Sipin's stunning achievements in California's healthcare sector and his selfless efforts in helping the needy make him a deserving recipient of the Circle Awards for Asian Healthcare Professionals given out by the Asian Writers Institute and the Filipino Writers Circle.

The award personifies not just the achievements of the Circle recipients but also the smooth and rough seas they have sailed through to become exceptional individuals whose stories and experiences could serve as an inspiration to thousands of Filipino immigrants in the United States.

He will receive the award, along with 11 other exceptional Asian healthcare professionals, during a special ceremony in their honor on Nov. 12, 2006 at the Clarion Hotel in San Francisco, California.

R-PAGE Inc., Barton & Associates, Best Nursing Services, Inc. and the Pacific Times joined hands with the Asian Writers Institute and the Filipino Writers Circle in making this worthy undertaking possible.