

Man Allowed to Fly From Philippines to Chicago to Donate Kidney

The Associated Press

February 22, 2004 - A man who spends 14 hours a day attached to a dialysis machine may soon get a new kidney after U.S. Embassy officials reversed a previous decision and granted a visa to the man's cousin, the only potential donor.

"Definitely, my prayers have been answered," said Erich Monzon, a 24-year-old Morton Grove resident who was diagnosed with lupus, an auto-immune disease that attacks the body's organs, when he was 16. "I am so happy to go on with law school and travel."

Monzon's cousin, Ben Liggayu applied for the temporary visa last November. The application was supported by the University of Illinois at Chicago's Organ and Tissue Transplant Services, which said Liggayu and Monzon have the same rare blood type -- AB -- and also have common DNA antigens. UIC also said it would pay for Liggayu to make the trip.

But the visa was denied by embassy officials, who said that the 41-year-old Liggayu had not demonstrated "sufficiently strong familial, economic or professional ties" that would cause him to return to the Philippines after visiting the United States.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., then asked the embassy to reconsider its decision. And last week, the embassy in Manila told Schakowsky that Liggayu would be granted a second interview.

Liggayu drove 12 hours from his home in Isabela to Manila for the interview. After the four-hour interview, he was told that more medical tests were needed.

That prompted Schakowsky to call the embassy again.

"I said, 'I am putting my reputation on the line to say that after the surgery, he will go back,'" said Schakowsky.

An official with the U.S. Embassy subsequently called Schakowsky and informed her that Liggayu was granted a visa.

Liggayu is expected to arrive in Chicago next month.