

□ Kidney Donor Refused Visa

CBS 2 Chicago

Feb 16, 2004

A man in need of a kidney transplant says U.S. Embassy officials are refusing to give a visa to the only compatible and willing donor he has found.

Even though a transplant is medically needed, U.S. officials in Manila are refusing to sign off on a temporary visa. They say they fear the donor might not go back home.

Apparently, there has always been an assumption that temporary visas are never really temporary. That belief was even before 9/11. But post 9/11, the scrutiny and requirements to come to the U.S. are even more stringent. The idea is to protect the public, but in the process Eric Monzon is losing precious time.

Among the vials of pills, latex gloves, and masks, Monzon keeps an eye on the dialysis machine. In just a moment he will disconnect himself. This ritual is repeated each day. 14 hours of dialysis, 10 hours off.

"It's frustrating. There's a lot of thing I want to do with my life. I'm stuck here for majority of my day," Monzon said.

For the 24 year old, law school is now on hold. To survive, Monzon needs a kidney transplant, and so he's been on a waiting list for almost four years.

"I have a pretty rare blood type, AB positive. It's very hard to find matches in the U.S. or anywhere because it's such a rare blood type," Monzon said.

But after an extensive search, a match was found: Monzon's cousin, in the Philippines. He not only meets the criteria, he's willing to temporarily leave his four children, wife and job to come here to the University of Illinois at Chicago Medical Center and donate a kidney.

Not so fast. On November 14, 2003, the U.S. Embassy in Manila denied his cousin's request for a temporary visa, and time is of the essence. Erich's attorney believes two main factors are

holding up the process: adequate assurances the cousin will return to his country and the medical costs

"The long and short of it is he has to have it and there's only a certain period of time he can remain on dialysis for 14 hours a day," said Monzon's attorney, Al Knorr.

Letters from UIC officials state the cousin's medical expenses will be covered and how. In addition, Representative Jan Schakowsky wrote to the Embassy expressing her confidence that he will not remain in the U.S., and he is coming solely to enhance and prolong his cousin's life.

"That our government would stand in the way I think to most people is unacceptable. I'm hoping that will be persuasive," Rep. Schakowsky said.

"I pray every day and I just hope something's going to come through and work out in the end," Monzon said.

Representative Schakowsky will be calling Manila tonight to check on the status of the visa request. She also intends to mention the publicity surrounding this story. CBS 2 tried to contact immigration officials today, but because of President's Day we were unsuccessful.