

The care needed to fix a broken heart

Idalia Peraza should not have lived past the age of 20.

Over the last 36 years Ms. Peraza, a developmentally disabled woman from Honduras, has been suffering from a common congenital heart defect called Tetralogy of Fallot. When Ms. Peraza was born she had a hole in her heart causing her to literally turn blue when the blood crossed through the hole without entering the lungs.

For years Ms. Peraza has been suffering with nausea and breathlessness. A few months ago she started having terrible fevers, vomiting and chest pain. Her sister, Mercedes Ruiz whom she lives with, took her to see Midatlantic cardiologist, Dr. Stacy Fisher who diagnosed her heart problem and arranged for Ms. Peraza to have heart surgery with Dr. Jeffrey Sell, cardiothoracic surgeon at Midatlantic and St. Joseph Medical Center, Towson, free of charge.

“I really don’t know how she lived for 36 years like that,” said Mrs. Ruiz, a parishioner of St. Charles Borromeo, Pikesville. “I’m grateful to all of the doctors who have been helping her.”

The hole in Ms. Peraza’s heart was two inches by two inches according to Dr. Sell and there was a blockage in her pulmonary artery which surprisingly protected her from becoming even more sick. Dr. Sell said Ms. Peraza’s two main arteries are supposed to be equal in size but the pulmonary artery was much smaller than the aorta which was bigger than usual.

After fixing the hole in Ms. Peraza’s heart with a cloth-like patch, Dr. Sell widened

her pulmonary artery by building her a pathway using a new valve. This procedure will allow Ms. Peraza to be more active and breath more deeply.

“I don’t know how to thank everyone who has helped us,” said Mrs. Ruiz. “They have been so sweet to my sister.”

Mrs. Ruiz said her faith has grown even stronger with her sister’s hospitalization and she believes the doctors and nurses caring for her sister were sent from God. She said she and her sister pray the rosary as often as possible, especially since Ms. Peraza has been in the hospital.

“For my sister to be alive is a miracle,” said Mrs. Ruiz. “I don’t have the words to thank them for what they have done for my sister.”

In Ms. Peraza’s situation this procedure is much safer than finding her a new heart. She will only have to take a few medications in comparison to what she might have to take with a new heart. This operation should significantly prolong her life, said Dr. Sell.

“She had a problem and I could fix it. She has a wonderful family that takes great care of her,” said Dr. Sell. “The operation was the easy part, getting over it is the tough part.”

The Midatlantic Foundation helped make arrangements with St. Joseph Medical Center for the surgery and agreed to pay for post-operative medications.