

My name is Kathy Vesperman and my husband, Bob, has had two extended stays at Bethesda Hospital. First, in 1993, Bob (who was 55 years old at the time) suffered a serious stroke. As if that wasn't enough of a blow to our family, he also then contracted and battled Guillain Barre syndrome, an autoimmune disorder that causes paralysis. Bob's entire body was impaired—he couldn't move his chest, his toes, not even his eyelids. For three months, Bob required highly complex daily medical care, care he could not have received as an inpatient at a community hospital or at a nursing home.

After being dependent on a ventilator for three months, he had to learn how to do everything again from scratch: walk, climb the stairs, tie his shoes, even breathe. Both the stroke and the Guillain Barre had taken a significant toll on his health. Through intensive respiratory and other types of therapy, Bob made solid progress. Finally, three and one-half months later, Bob was discharged to our home to continue his recovery. Our family was together again. Bob likes to say that Bethesda Hospital gave him back a life to live.

Fifteen years elapsed until we needed Bethesda Hospital again. And, in the fall of 2008, Bethesda was there for us.

Following a coronary artery bypass and valve replacement surgery, Bob experienced several serious complications. He had congestive heart failure and was unable to breathe on his own. He had a tracheotomy tube inserted and was placed on a ventilator.

Several of his organs began to fail. His diabetes needed careful management. Bob carried more than 30 pounds of excess fluid in his system. Things were headed in the wrong direction, but Bethesda Hospital kept working to bring him back.

In late January/early February, I'm sad to say that our family started making funeral plans for Bob. But Bethesda Hospital didn't give up—they kept developing new treatment plans to save him.

Ultimately, they succeeded in removing the fluids that were shutting down his body. They dealt with the complications from his diabetes. Therapists from every specialty area worked hard to build his strength back up. Two months ago, on February 21, 2009, Bob joined me (in his wheelchair and with a trach mask) in Bethesda Hospital's chapel to watch our son get married.

So here we are, seven months after Bob's heart surgery. He is still at Bethesda. But, miraculously, he is alive and the medical team is planning to discharge him sometime in May.

And I still have a husband, our children still have their father, and our grandchildren still have their grandfather.

I am eternally grateful for the compassionate and dedicated medical care that Bob has received. I have no idea what we would have done in both cases without Bethesda Hospital. There is no way I, or a community hospital, or a nursing home could have provided the medical interventions and the necessary therapies for Bob's recovery.

Please make the right decision for families like mine and for our community. Please vote against any additional cuts that would hurt places like Bethesda.