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DISTRICT

Battling to keep breathing

Former NE student urgently needs double lung transplant

By Kathryn Kelman
editor-in-chief

Before he showers, eats or says good morning to his family, Victor Garcia moves from his bed to a chair, slips on a vest that pounds his chest and inhales his first breathing treatment of the day.

At the end of his day, after two other treatments, Garcia hooks himself up to a CPAP machine to help him keep breathing and a feeding tube that administers four bottles of formula to help him maintain his weight.

Garcia, a former TCC student, has

reached a critical point in his battle with cystic fibrosis as his lung function has dropped to 18 percent. He needs a double lung transplant.

And now, he's reaching out to the public for help.

Garcia started a GoFundMe page to raise money for the transplant because his insurance won't cover it and his family can't afford it. In a month, the page has raised over \$5,000, and Garcia is grateful.

"It gives me a lot of hope — it's a big thing," Garcia said. "I know it's hard to give to people you don't know."

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Gabrielle Saleh/The Collegian

Former NE student Victor Garcia demonstrates how to use one of the machines that administers a medication to help treat his cystic fibrosis.

TCC women are saying ...

ME TOO



Gabrielle Saleh/The Collegian

Social media movement creates conversation on campus about sexual abuse, assault

By Raegan Scharfetter
managing editor

Falling asleep with the anticipation of being awakened by a sexual abuser is a nightmare for some people. For SE student Desiree Brown, this nightmare was real. She was 6 years old.

"My uncle would touch me in places and make me touch him in places that were inappropriate," Brown said. "Every night, he would wake me up from bed and make me touch him or let him touch me. He promised me many things if I did, and if I didn't the next day, I got beaten by my aunt."

Through the #MeToo movement on social media, America is having a conversation about sexual abuse, assault and harassment in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein scandals. The TCC community is part of that conversation, and some of them shared their stories with *The Collegian*.

Every 98 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted. Every eight minutes, that victim is a child. Yet, only six out of every 1,000 perpetrators will end up in prison, according to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network.

Luckily for Brown, her abuser was one of those six.

"It lasted for six months. Then he was

arrested," she said.

RAINN statistics show 79 percent of survivors who were victimized by a family member, close friend or acquaintance experience professional or emotional issues.

The effects inflicted by Brown's abuser left her only wanting to have sex with multiple partners.

"I was really depressed, and I never really talked at all to anyone then," Brown said. "I would sleep with guys just to feel something. I thought that was my purpose."

Sometimes, Brown still blames herself for being too nice and friendly but also blames him because he was just a "sick monster," she said.

"The #MeToo movement is a great way to show that sexual abuse happens every day. And when you don't speak up and tell someone when it happens, you will become something you're not," Brown said. "It's important for people to stand up and speak their truth because they believe they're the only person that's going through the abuse. There is always someone going through what you are or have been through, and you never know unless you speak up."

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NORTHWEST

Swimmers seek answers from board over rate hike

By Kathryn Kelman
editor-in-chief

Swimmers, coaches and parents from Sigma Swimmers spilled out of the room at the board of trustees meeting Oct. 19.

The program sought answers regarding a major change to their contract and looked to the board to help settle the contract dispute with NW Campus.

Last year, the program paid \$44,850 to rent the NW pool for the entire year. This year, Sigma is being asked to pay \$557,200 for the whole year, amounting to a more than 200 percent increase in rent.

"There is no pool in the country charging these rates," said Sigma coach Andrew Ha. "The Olympic Training Center does not charge these rates. Would TCC raise tuition on students by 233 percent?"

Several TCC administrators did not respond to multiple attempts seeking comment.

Ha would be happy with returning to the previous contract price.

"We would still pay almost double what other pools charge," he said.

Sigma Swimmers, a nonprofit program, has been swimming on NW for 10 years. The rate increase is likely to sink the program.

"It's not sustainable," said Tara Blair, a mom with two sons in the program. "We've already lost families who can't pay the increased rates."

Due to the contract dispute, the program could not start its season until three weeks after the normal start date, also costing them funding, she said.

To get kids in the pool, Ha, under duress, signed a temporary three-month contract for \$46,900, Blair said.

"We're paying more for three months than we were paying for the entire year," she said. "It's outrageous. It's not a fair business practice."

Blair also said Ha was lied to.

"They told him that all the other pools would be signing at these rates too," she said. "After he signed this, Mars renewed at TCC SE for \$2,600 a month, which is about a \$26,000 contract for the entire year."

NE and South also charge lower rates, Blair said.

Sigma has been told the group could go elsewhere if it didn't like the rent increase, but there isn't another pool in the NW area, Blair said.

"We just want a fair deal," she said.

Ha and Blair met with officials from NW and Chancellor Eugene Giovannini and the board Oct. 5, prior to the board meeting Oct. 19. Blair said there were crickets.

"Nobody has told us anything other than [board of trustees] President [Louise] Appleman, who said that it was referred back to TCC NW," she said.

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“He asks him, ‘When you get your new lungs, you’ll be able to play soccer again? Do karate again?’”

TERE RAMIREZ

Garcia’s mother said about his younger brother

Garcia (continued from page 1)

Cystic fibrosis is an inherited condition caused by mutations in a single gene. The condition reduces a patient’s lifespan by causing the body to overproduce a thick mucus, which can lead to life-threatening lung infections. Symptoms vary and can include a cough, repeated lung infections and an inability to gain weight.

“My doctors told me when I was at 21 percent lung function, they said ‘You’re in that point where you need a lung transplant. It has to be now because later on if you get too sick, we won’t be able to do the surgery on you,’” Garcia said.

Garcia and his family turned to the insurance they obtained through the Children with Special Health Care Needs Services Program, but it doesn’t cover lung transplants.

“That’s when we started moving around and checked the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and other insurance to see if I qualify for any of them, and I don’t,” he said. “We talked to hospitals to see if they could arrange something, but they said no.”

So that’s when Garcia and his family decided to open a GoFundMe account to raise money for the transplant.

Garcia doesn’t qualify for other insurance because he isn’t a U.S. citizen. He was born in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico. At the age of 2, he was

diagnosed with cystic fibrosis and learned his battle to breathe would be a lifelong one, he said.

Over the years, his condition worsened. At the age of 10, his lung function was down to 17 percent, he said.

“The doctors told me the only way to keep living was to come to the U.S.,” Garcia said.

So, his parents sold everything they had and moved to North Texas, leaving behind their friends and family. Upon arriving in the U.S., Garcia went straight to Children’s Hospital in Dallas.

“I had to go straight to the ICU because I was in terrible condition,” he said. “I had 17 percent of my lung function, and the doctors didn’t think I could make it.”

But he did. Garcia stayed in the intensive care unit for 2-3 weeks before being moved to the cystic fibrosis floor.

“Over the years, I was able to regain my lung capacity,” he said. “It went from 17 to 21 to 23 to 32.”

At one point, Garcia and his doctors got his lung function all the way up to 48 percent, he said.

“That was four years ago, but they found something else,” Garcia said.

In addition to cystic fibrosis, Garcia learned he had autoimmune hepatitis in his liver, he said. His doc-



Photos by Gabrielle Saleh/The Collegian

Former NE Campus student Victor Garcia prepares food with his mother, Tere Ramirez, and his little brother, Emmanuel Ramirez at home in their kitchen.

tors told him the only way to prevent it from doing more harm was to start him on immune suppressants, but helping his liver meant hurting his lungs. His body could no longer fight off the bacteria that infected and weakened them.

“So they gave me the immune suppressants, and I started getting sick more often,” Garcia said.

His liver function improved, but his lungs began to fail as he continued to get sick, he said.

“Everything went just downhill,” Garcia said.

Now Garcia goes to the hospital every three months for three weeks at a time to get antibiotics and more treatment. During that time, his family also spends much of their days there with him.

“As a mother, you don’t think about it,” said Tere Ramirez, Garcia’s mother. “It impacts his brother a little more.”

Ramirez and her husband both work to cover bills, but Ramirez gets home from work around 2 p.m. to be with her sons. When Garcia is in the hospital, she leaves work, picks up Emmanuel, Garcia’s little brother, and goes to the hospital.

“It’s really hard because we don’t have family here,” she said. “We have to do everything between us four.”

The family stays in constant communication by phone and tries to live as normally as they possibly can, Ramirez said.

“We have picnics on the patio



Garcia’s mother, Tere Ramirez, helps him get his medication out for one of the three breathing treatments he takes each day.

and walk the dogs,” she said.

Garcia’s little brother is eager for him to have the transplant, Ramirez said.

“He asks him, ‘When you get your new lungs, you’ll be able to play soccer again? Do karate again?’” she said.

Two years ago, Garcia was more active. He was taking classes on NE Campus. But then he caught the flu, and his lungs couldn’t recover.

“After a long stay [at the hospi-

tal], I was prescribed the use of oxygen 24 hours a day,” he said.

He can no longer leave the house for more than three hours at a time, Ramirez said.

“If he goes outside, he’ll spend the next day in bed recovering,” she said.

Garcia said lung fatigue is really tough, especially the longer it’s been since his last hospital stay.

Garcia also struggles to find the energy to do basic activities at home.

“Because of my serious condition, my lungs run the risk of collapsing, which is why a double lung transplant is urgently needed,” Garcia said.

A lung transplant costs around \$1 million, and his family doesn’t have the financial resources to pay for it, Garcia said. His GoFundMe page has a goal set at \$750,000 in hopes that if they come up with most of the money, they can work something out with a hospital to make payments on the rest.

His page has been up for over a month and has raised over \$5,000 in that time, but the momentum has slowed a lot.

Garcia hopes to get the transplant and go back to school to become a translator.

“I want to give back to the community that has given me so much as soon as I can,” he said.

His doctor warned him in case he gets sick and his heart fails, he had to choose what he wanted the doctors to do.

His doctor recommended Garcia not choose being resuscitated because he would have to be put on a ventilator, and patients on ventilators who are not candidates for transplant have a very poor quality of life, he said.

“So right now if I have a heart attack, I will not be resuscitated,” Garcia said. “Another reason why this is so urgent.”

To read more about Garcia’s story or to donate, go to: <https://www.gofundme.com/ATransplantForVictor>.



Garcia has been attached to oxygen 24/7 after he got the flu over a year ago. His lungs never recovered from the virus.



Garcia and his family do their best to live as normally as they can throughout the struggles and obstacles cystic fibrosis brings to their lives.