Vatican
Vatican News
Nuns pray next to the statue of St. John Paul II outside Rome's Gemelli Hospital Feb. 20, 2025

Nuns pray next to the statue of St. John Paul II outside Rome's Gemelli Hospital Feb. 20, 2025, where Pope Francis is admitted for treatment for a respiratory infection. The Vatican press office said early Feb. 20 that the pope had a peaceful night, "got up and had breakfast in an armchair." (OSV News/Reuters/Guglielmo Mangiapane)



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Pope Francis' doctors believe the 88-year-old pontiff is not in danger of death at the moment, but that the therapy for his double pneumonia needs time to work and will require at least another week of hospitalization.

"If the question is: Is the pope out of danger? No, not yet," said a representative from his medical team on Feb. 21. "But is he in danger of death now? The answer, once again, is no."

During the first press conference with the pope's medical team since he was first admitted to the hospital on Feb. 14, Dr. Sergio Alfieri and Dr. Luigi Carbone warned that Francis is "fragile" and that treating pneumonia in both lungs, on top of his chronic bronchitis, requires an extensive treatment plan.

The pope is not currently attached to any machines for breathing, although he occasionally uses an oxygen mask. The medical team said the pontiff is responding to the strengthened treatment and noted that he is currently receiving a high volume of medication.

While the doctors said that Francis will eventually return to his Vatican residence, he will continue to experience ongoing respiratory problems.

"If we let him go home, he'll start working like before," the doctors said.

The pope's doctors noted that Francis left his room in the afternoon of Feb. 21 to pray for 20 minutes in the chapel of his suite on the 10th floor of Rome's Gemelli Hospital. The medical team said they would advise the pope tomorrow, Feb. 22, on whether he should lead the Sunday Angelus prayer or whether he should continue to rest.

It was one week ago today when, after weeks of struggling with shortness of breath, Francis acquiesced to pressure from his aides and sought hospital care. During the press conference on Friday afternoon, doctors said that prior to entering hospital, the pope was being treated by his nurse, Massimiliano Strappetti, who was regularly consulting with doctors.

Francis' doctors also said that the reason no photos have been released is that images of the pontiff in his pajamas would be an inappropriate violation of his privacy. The medical team also said that Francis has not lost his appetite or his sense of humor during his eight-day hospitalization.

As the octogenarian pope has battled pneumonia, rumors have swirled that Vatican officials are preparing for his funeral or an imminent resignation.

On Feb. 20, retired Italian Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi gave an interview where he suggested the pope might consider resignation if he did not feel up to the job.

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His remarks rippled throughout the Vatican, with some critics deeming them taboo and comparing them to the efforts to pressure U.S. President Joe Biden to drop out of the 2024 presidential race.

In response to the uptick in online betting and the endless guessing games over who might one day succeed Francis, some of the pope's closest allies have engaged in a full court press of media interviews to tamp down on such speculation.

Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, dean of the College of Cardinals, gave an interview sharply denying rumors that the pope might resign.

"Let's not make anything up, the pope is recovering," said the 91-year-old Italian cardinal. "There is no need to talk about resignation, [the pope] will return to the Vatican in a few days."

The pope's longtime Argentine collaborator and head of the Vatican's doctrinal office, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández, also sought to calm the waters.

"I don't see a pre-conclave atmosphere, I don't see any more conversations about a possible successor than there were a year ago, that is, nothing special," said Fernández. "So far, I sense a lot of respect."

In another interview, Andrea Riccardi — founder of the Sant'Egidio community and arguably the most prominent lay Catholic in Italy — lambasted talk of resignation as an "obsession."

He said that he believes Francis intends to continue in his ministry but will reassess his priorities and which events and travels he is able to say yes to in the future.

Bologna's Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, who serves as president of the Italian Bishops' Conference and who is occasionally mentioned as a potential successor to Francis, was also full of optimism.

"We are on the path to a full recovery," said Zuppi, "which we hope will happen soon."

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This story appears in the **Pope Francis' health crisis** feature series. View the full series.