Vatican
Vatican News



Massimiliano Strappetti, the nurse who is Pope Francis' primary medical caregiver at the Vatican, adjusts a microphone for the pope as he greets a crowd of well-wishers at Rome's Gemelli hospital before returning to the Vatican March 23, 2025. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

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***Editor's note**: This story has been updated to include news that Britain's King Charles III will reschedule his state visit to the Vatican.*

For Pope Francis' medical team at Rome's Gemelli hospital, Feb. 28 was the worst day.

"For the first time I saw tears in the eyes of some of the people around him," Dr. Sergio Alfieri, the coordinator of his medical team, told the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera.

"We were all aware that the situation had deteriorated further and there was a risk that he might not make it," Alfieri said in the interview published March 25, two days after the pope was released from the hospital and returned to the Vatican.

The Vatican medical bulletin from Feb. 28 said: "The Holy Father, this afternoon, after a morning spent alternating between respiratory physiotherapy and prayer in the chapel, experienced an isolated episode of bronchospasm. This caused an episode of vomiting, which led to him inhaling some and a sudden worsening of his respiratory condition."

The doctors aspirated his airways and put him on noninvasive mechanical ventilation, a machine that delivers air with added oxygen through a tightly fitted face mask and using positive pressure to assist breathing.

Alfieri and Vatican officials have said several times that Francis was never intubated and that he always remained "alert and aware."

The doctor told Corriere, "We had to make a choice between stopping and letting him go or pressing on and trying all the drugs and therapies we could, running the very high risk of damaging other organs. And in the end, we took that path."

Asked who made the final decision, Alfieri said, "The Holy Father always decides."

But he added that Francis had "delegated all kinds of health care decisions to Massimiliano Strappetti, his personal health care assistant who knows perfectly well the pontiff's wishes."

Strappetti, a nurse who worked in intensive care at the Gemelli, joined the Vatican health service in 2002 and has become Pope Francis' primary health care provider, working in consultation with the pope's physicians.

Strappetti advised, "Try everything, don't give up," Alfieri said. "That's what we all thought too. And nobody gave up."

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Corriere also asked Alfieri if Francis was aware of the danger he was in.

"Yes," he responded, "because he was always alert. Even when his condition worsened, he was fully conscious. That night was terrible; he knew, as we did, that he might not make it through the night. We saw the man in pain. However, from the first day he asked us to tell him the truth and wanted us to be honest about his condition."

After 38 days in the hospital, Francis returned to the Vatican, but Alfieri and the other members of his medical team have said he will need two months to recuperate.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, spoke to reporters March 24 outside a meeting near the Vatican. He said he had not visited the pope yet because he wanted to allow him to rest.

The Secretariat of State and all Vatican offices keep working as normal, he said.

"I think that for the moment only the most important issues will be submitted to the pope, issues that require a decision on his part also so as not to tire him too much," Parolin said. "Then as he recovers, we will return to the normal rhythm."

Greeting people gathered outside the Gemelli hospital before leaving March 23, Francis was obviously weak, and his voice was barely audible.

While his doctors have urged him to avoid meetings with large groups, Parolin said he hoped the pope would be able to at least briefly greet Britain's King Charles III, who was scheduled to make a state visit to the Vatican April 8.

Late March 25 Buckingham Palace announced King Charles and Queen Camilla had postponed their Vatican visit to an undetermined date "as medical advice has now suggested that Pope Francis would benefit from an extended period of rest and recuperation."

"Their majesties send the pope their best wishes for his convalescence and look forward to visiting him in the Holy See once he has recovered," the statement said.

The pope's first days back home had a rhythm of rest, work, prayer and therapy, both respiratory and physical therapy, the Vatican press office said. A nurse was present 24 hours a day, and the pope was alternating between using high-flow oxygen, oxygen mixed with ambient air and not using the nasal cannula at all.

Francis concelebrated Mass March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, in the small chapel near his room on the second floor of the residence, the press office added. It did not say who the other concelebrants were.