

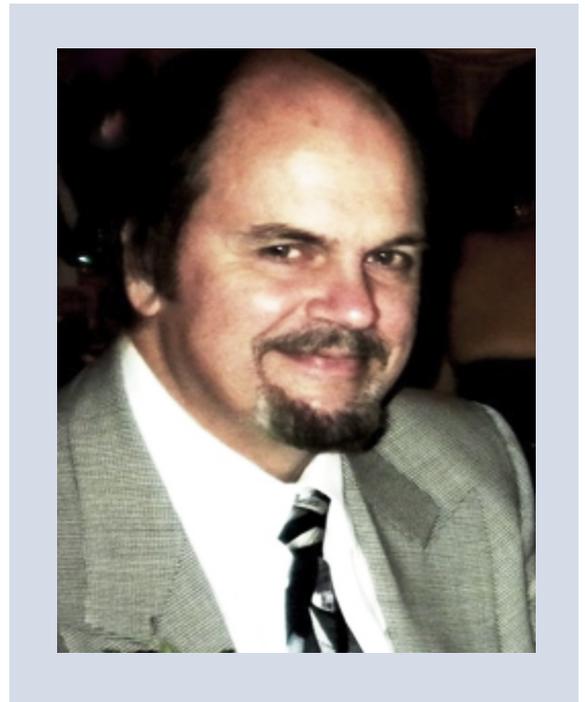
Rush University Medical Center, Chicago, IL

A Helping Hand

When Michael Ryan started his own software company, he was thrilled. But the joy of building his own start-up was tempered by his deteriorating health. He was shocked when his local physician diagnosed him with cirrhosis of the liver caused by hepatitis C acquired through a tainted blood transfusion. As his liver disease progressed to a point where his local doctors could not do anything more for him, they recommended that he seek treatment at Rush University Medical Center.

Michael was in the advanced stages of liver failure when he came to Rush. His only chance for survival was a liver transplant. As his health continued to decline, he was unable to work. He was in and out of the hospital for consultations, tests and procedures, and he suffered from mental confusion and memory lapses that can occur in the late stages of liver failure.

After receiving a liver transplant in 2005, he bounced back. Yet he faced an ocean of professional and financial debt. “The business was basically running on its own, and that led to a disaster by the time I got out of the hospital,” says Michael. “I had to shut down the business. With that, the insurance company dropped me because I didn’t have employees anymore.”



A financial lifeline

Between the money he invested to build his business and steep medical bills, Michael was drowning financially. That’s when financial counselors at Rush stepped in and helped Michael get into Rush’s charity care program. Through the charity care program, a patient’s hospital bills can be discounted up to 100 percent if the patient’s income is 300 percent of the federal poverty guidelines or less.

“Rush was kind enough to say, ‘We’ll take care of you until you get back on your feet,’” says Michael.

Michael requires lifelong post-transplant care. “Charity care definitely helps people like Michael,” says Nikunj Shah, MD, his hepatologist at Rush. “If he tried to buy commercial insurance, his premiums would be \$20,000 to \$25,000 per year. The sad thing is patients often lose their insurance because insurance companies know they will have to pay for medical care for the rest of the patient’s life after a transplant.”

An additional hurdle

As Michael began getting back on his feet, he hit another setback in early 2011. After his local doctor found that Michael had an elevated prostate-specific antigen level, he headed back to Rush. Kalyan Latchamsetty, MD, a urologist at Rush, found an aggressive form of prostate cancer that required surgery and radiation. Latchamsetty’s office worked with the Medical Center to provide Michael’s prostate cancer care and treatment at no cost.

“Similar to his transplant care, Michael needs lifelong follow-up for his cancer,” says Latchamsetty. “The charity care program eases patients’ financial burden and helps them recover better and faster because they don’t have to worry about the cost.”

Certainly, charity care has allowed Michael to focus on getting healthy and rebuilding his business rather than the financial ramifications of getting well.

“Charity care has made me feel like someone is in my corner,” says Michael. Rush has been a real friend, and I am so grateful for all they have done for me.”