

Young Patient Gets Life-Altering Care

New to Kaiser Permanente, 8-year-old RJ Mendoza was soon cured of his childhood health challenges.

When Recca “RJ” Mendoza came to the United States at just 6 years old in 2017, he had no idea that 2 years later he would be walking off the court at a Sacramento Kings game to thunderous applause.

But that’s exactly what happened on Sunday, November 17, as RJ and his Kaiser Permanente pediatric care team were recognized at center court.

RJ was born in the Philippines 2 weeks before his due date with a variety of health concerns.

“When he was born, he couldn’t breathe by himself,” recalled his mother, Evangeline Bell.

RJ received a tracheostomy and colostomy, which he still had when he emigrated to the U.S. Due to a lack of access, RJ’s family had resorted to using Ziplock bags in place of colostomy bags, and his tracheostomy hadn’t been changed out in nearly 4 years — something that is done weekly for Kaiser Permanente members.

After a year living in the U.S., RJ became a Kaiser Permanente member. At RJ’s first appointment, his Roseville pediatrician, [Philip Malouf, MD](#), knew much more could and should be done for the child, so he quickly referred RJ to Kaiser Permanente’s pediatric subspecialties team — one of the largest in greater Sacramento. The team evaluated RJ and came up with a care plan to improve his quality of life.

“Here at Kaiser Permanente, we have a really great integrated system — especially in our pediatric specialty department,” said [Brian Rubinstein, MD](#), a pediatric head and neck surgeon in Roseville. “For RJ, this was really routine for us and it makes taking care of these complex kids really easy.”

“Things worked out great because we immediately identified what those problems were, and what teams needed to be involved,” said [Doug Miniati, MD](#), a pediatric surgeon, also at Kaiser Permanente Roseville.

Over the next year, RJ had several medical appointments and procedures that culminated in his tracheostomy being permanently removed this past August.

“Since becoming a Kaiser Permanente member, RJ’s life has changed dramatically,” said his mother.

As part of Kaiser Permanente’s partnership and role as team physicians of the Sacramento Kings,

RJ, his family, and his Kaiser Permanente care team were recognized at center court during a timeout at a recent game. As they all left the court, the near sell-out crowd applauded and cheered as RJ accepted high-fives from fans.