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Struggles remain for choking victim, family

'We're trying to move on with our lives. It's hard, but it has to be done'

October 12, 2010

By **Sanne Specht**

Mail Tribune

Challenges continue for little Carlos Cortes as he battles the effects of a choking incident that has left him with a severe brain injury.

The 6-year-old was airlifted to Doernbecher Children's Hospital in Portland for the second time last week, this time because of a bout of pneumonia. Her son is home now, but there are more appointments ahead, including a surgery at Doernbecher's which is scheduled for later this month, said Jennifer Carter.

Life for Carlos and their family changed in an instant on August 2 when the boy choked on one of America's favorite foods — the hot dog, said the 28-year old Medford mom.

"This is the new family," Carter said. "We're trying to move on with our lives. It's hard, but it has to be done."

Carter said she is grateful for the approximately \$1,000 in cash that the community has donated thus far for Carlos' care after her family was featured in a Mail Tribune article in September.

But the family is still searching for a single-level rental home. It also needs a van that can carry him to and from his medical appointments, she said.

Carlos, who suffered an anoxic brain injury as a result of oxygen deprivation, now spends most of his time in a hospital bed in the living room of their two-story townhouse. His three siblings are struggling to adapt to the new Carlos. Jasmine, his 4-year-old sister, is the most verbal about missing her big brother, said Carter.

"He's here in front of her face," she said. "But Jas misses who he was."

The once active and gregarious boy is no longer on a ventilator, but he remains on a feeding tube. Physical therapists come twice a week to stretch his muscles, Carter said. Carlos will have surgery in Portland later this month in hopes it will protect him from aspirating and getting pneumonia again, she added.

He also will be evaluated for intensive rehabilitation therapy at Legacy Emanuel Hospital. Carlos' facial expressions seem happier, and he's making more noises, Carter said.

"There's always a hope that he may recover," she said. "I think he's going to get better."

For now, Carlos has to be turned every three hours, and carried to the upstairs bathroom to be bathed and have his diapers changed. At approximately 55 pounds, her son is too heavy for her to carry. Carlos is either dead weight, or he is as rigid as a board from involuntary muscle contractions, Carter said.

Carter had to quit her job at Walmart to care for her son. Carter's sister and her husband and their children are staying at Carter's two-story Medford townhouse because her brother-in-law is the only one strong enough to get Carlos up the stairs to the bathroom.

Reach reporter Sanne Specht at 541-776-4497 or e-mail sspecht@mailtribune.com.

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HOW YOU CAN HELP

Help Now!, a nonprofit organization located in Medford that provides professional advocacy services to those in need, has set up a trust account in Jennifer Carter's name to help her son, Carlos Cortes. Community members who wish to donate can send a check to 33 N. Central Ave., No. 211, Medford, OR 97501. For more information, call 541-732-1911 or visit <http://helpnowadvocacy.org>.

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