



Dr. Kimmelman was recently quoted in *The New York Post*

The New York Post, February 25, 2005 -- Pope John Paul II was rushed back to a Rome hospital yesterday and underwent an emergency tracheotomy — a 30-minute operation to help relieve severe breathing problems, authorities said. The 84-year-old pontiff was breathing with the help of a respirator after the operation and is expected to spend weeks recovering from what could be pneumonia. His condition raised concern that the voice of the Catholic Church might not be able to speak again for months — if at all. But the Vatican was careful to play down the pope's second health crisis in two weeks. "This is not a terminal illness," a Polish priest and papal confidant, Father Conrad Hejno, told Polish TV. Nevertheless, aides indicated yesterday's health scare was more serious than the bout of flu that sent John Paul to the Gemelli Polyclinic for nine days earlier this month. The pope's turn for the worse became evident when he was rushed to the hospital by ambulance at 11 a.m. The pope was conscious and sitting upright in a stretcher, according to witnesses. One said John Paul waved as he entered the clinic. He even cracked a joke to doctors who told him the operation would be a small one. The pontiff shot back, "Small! It depends for whom," according to Italian Cabinet Undersecretary Gianni Letta, who visited him. The Vatican said the pope was sent for "specialist care and further checks" after suffering a relapse of the flu on Wednesday. It said his readmission to the hospital, from which he was released 14 days ago, was only a "precautionary measure." But within hours, word circulated that the pope, who also suffers from Parkinson's disease and other ailments, was being prepared for surgery.

At 8:20 p.m., surgeons began the tracheotomy, a common operation in which a tube is inserted in a patient's throat to ease breathing. The procedure involves cutting a small opening into the neck and windpipe to allow air to flow directly into the lungs. Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls said the pontiff had given his consent to the 30-minute operation. Letta, a top aide to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, said John Paul was "serene" after waking up from the anesthesia. The pope raised his hand and attempted to speak with doctors but was told not to try, he told reporters. Papal aides were upbeat about his recovery. "The operation . . . ended successfully. The immediate post-operative progress is regular," the Vatican said in statement. It said he would spend the night in the hospital and indicated a more detailed report on his health would be issued today.

Medical authorities said the pope will likely be hospitalized for at least a week. **"While he recovers from the surgery, they have to take care of the wound, to make sure there is no infection," Dr. Charles Kimmelman said. "They will be watching him very carefully." Doctors don't want to remove the tracheal tube prematurely," said Kimmelman, of Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital. "They will be very conservative. It may be necessary to maintain it for days, even weeks," he said. The frail pontiff will not initially be able to speak because of the tube, he said.**