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In this image distributed by Vatican Media, Pope Francis visits the Pediatric Oncology ward of the Agostino Gemelli University Polyclinic in Rome Thursday, June 15, 2023, where he's recovering from abdominal surgery since June 7. Francis, 86, underwent the operation to repair a hernia in the abdominal wall and to remove scar tissue that had formed following intestinal surgery in previous years. (Vatican Media via AP, ho)

by Associated Press

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Rome — June 15, 2023

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Pope Francis visited the children's cancer ward of Rome's Gemelli hospital on the eve of his expected discharge following abdominal surgery, the Vatican said June 15.

The Vatican released the first images of Francis since his June 7 hospitalization, showing him in his wheelchair in the corridor of the pediatric oncology ward, meeting with children, their parents and medical staff. In one photo, he is shown elsewhere speaking with a couple in a private room, the man in a wheelchair.

The Vatican said Francis also met with the staff and administration of the hospital and said doctors confirmed he would be discharged the morning of June 16.

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The 86-year-old pope was admitted to Gemelli hospital on June 7 for surgery to repair a hernia in his abdominal wall and remove intestinal scar tissue that had caused blockages. It was his third hospitalization at Gemelli as pope, and confirmed a trend that he visits young cancer patients the day before he is discharged.

Francis in 2021 had 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his colon removed at Gemelli because of a narrowing of the intestine.

He was admitted for three days this spring after coming down with bronchitis, and similarly paid a visit to the cancer ward before being discharged.