

Hello life — fully-fledged and healthy!

Belarusian transplantology on verge of conquering heart and kidney double operation

No one is surprised by transplants these days. However, about 18 years ago, such operations seemed incredible to famous cardiologist and academician Georgy Sidorenko. On visiting Poland, he met patients with new hearts and was much surprised to see them up and about, walking vigorously down hospital corridors.

“So far, about 50 hearts have been transplanted in Belarus,” explains the Head of the Heart Surgery Laboratory at the National Cardiology Research Centre, a corresponding member of Belarus’ National Academy of Sciences, Yuri Ostrovsky. “We can compare this figure with Lithuania’s success: there, only 75 operations of the kind have been conducted since 1987.”

New heart

The figures speak for themselves, evincing the huge sums injected by Belarus into developing this modern medical branch. Citizens receive high-tech assistance previously viewed as a flight of fancy. In the past two years, a great breakthrough has been made in mastering the latest transplant technologies. Of course, while being more common, patients must still be in a critical condition to qualify for a new organ, with children being given preference.

Clear leader

Back in 1997, Denis Bes-

sonov was a small boy. Today, he’s a grown man in good health. He doesn’t dwell on his past problems but, many years ago, he had a marrow transplant. Foreign doctors who were present at the operation stressed that any country offering such high-tech assistance could be viewed as well developed.

Over the past decade particularly, Belarus has become viewed as a clear leader in marrow transplantation within the post-Soviet space. Over a hundred such operations have been conducted in our country. The Director of the National Research Centre for Paediatric Oncology and Haematology, Olga Aleinikova, asserts confidently, “Russia and Ukraine need to catch up. However, Belarus lacks marrow donors, since they must be living, and we lack our own donor register. We hope that the problem may be settled once the Union State project is realised, as a Belarus-Russia common register would give us access to a greater number of potential donors.”

Going ahead

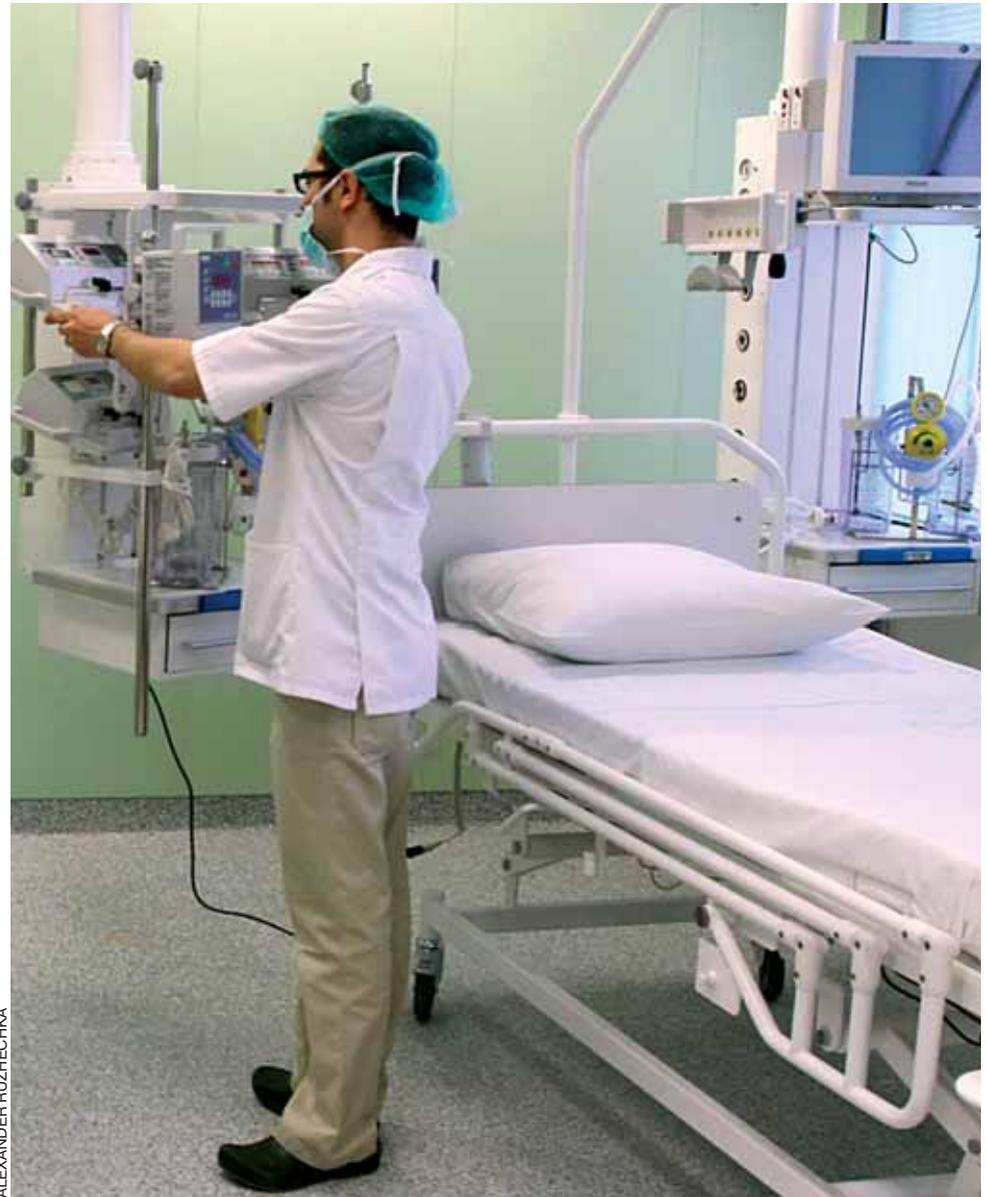
Further progress is in the air: simultaneous heart and kidney transplants. Mr. Ostrovsky — an authority in the field of cardio-surgery — tells us that the simultaneous transplantation of more than one organ is complicated, requiring much preparation.

Prof. Peter Neuhaus has succeeded in replacing nine organs in just a single operation but Belarusian doctors are yet to follow his example. Their major focus is ensuring proper post-operative rehabilitation. According to Mr. Ostrovsky, the next step is the simultaneous transplantation of heart and lung or heart and liver. In fact, the dual nature of these operations is easily explained: when the heart fails to work properly, other organs suffer, receiving insufficient blood and oxygen.

Foreigners heading to Belarus

This year, Belarusian doctors have already transplanted 151 organs, including 14 for foreign citizens. “To some degree, we are now hostages of our reputation. Belarusian transplantologists already boast a certain image, with many foreign patients eager to receive operations in our country,” admits Oleg Rummo, the Director of the Organ and Tissue National Transplantation Centre. “It’s profitable for any country to render medical assistance to foreign citizens but our ultimate task is to primarily help Belarusians.”

Patients from the CIS, the EU and Israel have received help in Belarus. A single transplantation costs



ALEXANDER RUZHECHKA

Doctors’ professionalism enables them to set great goals

enough to allow three Belarusians to receive similar operations. Speaking of whether it is the high professionalism of Belarusian transplantologists which attracts foreigners to Belarus, Mr. Rummo notes that some are guided by competitive pricing, since transplants in Belarus cost far less than in the European Union.

Preferable country to reside in

Specialists believe that people are becoming more accepting of the idea of donating their own organs or those of loved ones. Not long ago, a 29 year old man died in a district centre, after a grave head injury.

His mother gave permission for his kidney to be transplanted to her niece; many similar examples are now being registered.

Moreover, an increasing number of Belarusian patients are ready to accept the idea of receiving a transplant, registering on the waiting list. Most need new kidneys, with their wait tending to last just over two years.

This year, Belarus plans to conduct about 300 organ transplants, almost rivalling Israel, Cuba and Argentina. At present,

less operations are being seen in Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Brazil and China. However, Belarus hopes to make further progress; there is no doubt that the number should rise.

Importantly, Belarusians don’t need to pay for such operations. “In Azerbaijan, for example, fees are charged, so those families without spare finances cannot be helped and patients sadly die. It’s something to consider when choosing where to live!” Mr. Rummo notes.

Optimistic statistics

Last year, 169 organs and 155 marrows were transplanted in Belarus. Our country tops the CIS in the number of transplantations per million citizens: 18.

Jubilee brings gifts

By Sergey Kochetov

Ambulance produced by Vitebsk FEZ Grandiscar replenishes Vitebsk Region’s fleet

Vitebsk doctors have been given the new ambulance by the Belarusian-Russian joint venture to mark the International Slavonic Bazaar in Vitebsk Arts Festival’s 20th anniversary. Grandiscar’s Director, Yuri Lyubimov, stressed at a solemn ceremony that the ambulance is equipped for long distance transportation of seriously ill patients. It boasts a plentiful supply of oxygen and can carry additional equipment while ensuring a smooth ride for doctors and patients, which is very important. “Grandiscar’s donation of an ambulance to the Vitebsk Region’s health protection system confirms the company’s interest in doing business in Belarus; it is ea-



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Ambulance donated to Vitebsk doctors

ger to realise investment projects in the Vitebsk Region,” said Mr. Lyubimov.

Grandiscar aims to produce specialised vehicles at the Vitebsk FEZ, with up to 5,000 vehicles manufactured annually. About \$15m is to be invested by Russian and Belarusian sides in the coming five years.

Grandiscar produces ambulanc-

es, police vehicles, minibuses and other models based on Volkswagen and Ford chassis; other foreign and Belarusian brands are expected for use in the future. In 2011, the company hopes to produce up to 300 cars, primarily for Belarusian customers. Apart from supplying Belarus, Grandiscar plans to sell to the Russian and CIS markets.

Cuban doctors propose homeopathic drug based on scorpion venom

By Anastasia Veremeeva

Cuban Labiofam’s scorpion venom treatment for dreaded cancer could soon be available in Belarus

A Cuban delegation recently visited Minsk, meeting the Belarusian Health Ministry and cancer related institutions, in addition to the National Academy of Sciences. Labiofam’s Alexis Díaz García notes that the company’s ‘vidatox’ has been known on Cuban and foreign markets for 15 years, proving efficient in treating over 500,000 patients. “This homeopathic medicine uses *Rhopalurus junceus* scorpion venom — found only in Cuba; venom of other scorpions cannot be used,” explains the doctor, not-

ing that the scorpions are kept at the laboratory for just one year before being released.

The drug boasts an antitumor and anaesthetic effect, improving the quality of life and life expectancy of patients otherwise viewed as terminal, with only a few drops of the drug required. “Some of those expected to live no more than a matter of months have been alive for a decade and remain with us,” says the scientist.

Labiofam produces over 150 medicines, including six homeopathic drugs. It has 14 branches in Cuba and three abroad — including in China and Vietnam. A branch producing its drugs could also be launched in Belarus in the future.