

Weak heart may stop but life goes on, due to doctors' efforts

Miracles do happen, especially at Christmas time. This year's holiday brought life saving operations for seven Belarusian children suffering from congenital heart disease. Experienced Belarusian and foreign cardio-surgeons gave their time to the *Children's Heart* charity since its 2000. It is jointly run by the Belarusian Health Ministry, the Republican Cardiology Scientific-Practical Centre, the Belarusian Children's Fund and the International Children's Heart Charity Fund (Memphis, USA).

By Yevgenia Snitkova

Operations have been conducted at the Republican Children's Cardio-Surgery Centre since 2000 through the scheme, with Belarusian doctors receiving help in mastering new techniques from famous American William Novik: Professor of Surgery at Tennessee University and Director of the Children's Heart Fund.

Severe case

Five year old Zlata, from Brest, is already eager to show her toys to other patients on the ward and is running around her bed, despite only having been operated upon five days ago. The experienced team of cardio-surgeons — headed by Mr. Novik spent seven hours working on her heart.

"My daughter was born with aortic valve failure," Zlata's mother, Nina, tells us. "This was clear immediately after her birth. Our shock then became fear: how would my baby live?" One heart valve opened in reverse, affecting blood circulation, since blood ran back into the left ventricle. The situation was grave, and would eventually have been terminal were it not for her receiving surgery on the second day of her life. However, this was just the beginning...

"My daughter is still growing but her aortic valve remains unchanged," explains Nina. "She hasn't been feeling unwell but the doctors say she may experience health problems in about six months. Through the *Children's Heart* charity, the best surgeons have operated on Zlata. We really hope she'll be fine."

Return to life

"The Ross open heart procedure was the only solution for the girl," explains the Deputy Director for Child Cardio-Surgery at the Cardiology Republican



Cardio-surgeons Mikhail Shved, Vitaly Dedovich and American Prof. Novik make examination after operation



Prof. Novik is pleased with his mission

Scientific-Practical Centre, Konstantin Drozdovsky. "At present, she feels well and should return to normality within five days."

Domestic cardio-surgery has advanced significantly; just fifteen years ago, children suffering from heart problems could only be operated upon after reaching a certain weight

(10kg). Now, modern technologies and new equipment allow even newborns to receive surgery, offering them a better chance of recovery.

"Our specialists perform all but the most complex operations now. Only extremely complicated cases are beyond our technical expertise," notes Mr. Droz-

dovsky. "Prof. Novik's huge experience in the field of children's cardio-surgery is a great help. He travels all over the world and has seen over 250 pathologies, so can help us master new techniques." Complicated operations are conducted as part of the *Children's Heart* programme, with Prof. Novik having participated in



There are no easy patients

our help," admits Mr. Novik. "Their qualifications are already high — even higher than in Europe. Meanwhile, the Republican Children's Cardio-Surgery Centre meets global standards."

Heart-related affairs

"This joint project has been running for over a decade in our country," notes the Director of the Belarusian Children's Fund Republican Public Association, Alexander Trukhan. "Over this time, over 400 babies suffering from serious diseases have been successfully operated upon; meanwhile, over 1,800 have received consultations."

Other specialists also visit, offering training for medical staff: from our surgeons to nurses. Mr. Novik-led international teams include specialists from 11 countries — including members from the USA, Canada, Australia, the UK and Germany.

"For many children, these joint Belarusian and foreign doctor teams offer their only opportunity for recovery," continues Mr. Trukhan. "Of course, operations are conducted free of charge: our Fund's staff, jointly with volunteers, invite, host and accompany these international teams. Visits are funded by a Belarusian company, which covers all expenses relating to doctors' stay in our country. Moreover, the company provides the Republican Children's Cardio-Surgery Centre with everything it needs for its operations, as well as for the treatment and recuperation of young patients."

The *Children's Heart* programme also helps children regain their health after surgery. Over the past seven years, the Nadezhda (Hope) Rehabilitation Centre has been welcoming young patients onto its *Merry Hearts* project. Doctors, psychologists and rehabilitating staff work to restore the children's faith in themselves and their belief in the future. So far, 307 children have received help.



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