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Heart-recipient

"THANKS FOR GIVING ME SECOND LIFE" SAYS HEART RECIPIENT

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 10 (Bernama) -- "Thank you for giving me a second life," R. Sathrugnan, Malaysia's first heart transplant recipient, said to the doctors who operated on him and the family of the heart donor.

These words were not enough to convey his feeling of indebtedness to those responsible for giving him another lease on life, the 51-year-old technician from Klang told reporters today, 55 days after the historic operation conducted by National Heart Institute (IJN).

Sathrugnan, diagnosed for "end-stage heart failure", had waited for seven months for a "good heart" to come along before undergoing the transplantation on Dec 18.

Looking healthy and happy in his first public appearance since the operation, the father of six children aged between 16 and 28 said he learnt about the state of his health when he suffered a heart attack in 1990.

He underwent coronary angioplasty surgery four years later to clear a blocked coronary vessel and was later placed on the institute's heart transplant list.

Four more patients remain on the list, after several others had either improved in their condition or died while waiting for donor hearts.

Present at the news conference were Sathrugnan's wife, M. Rachael, 44, Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng, IJN chairman Tan Sri Abdul Hamid Pawanteh, IJN cardiothoracic surgery chief Datuk Dr Yahya Awang, who led the 16-member surgical team and the team members.

Sathrugnan's successful heart transplant operation took place exactly 30 years after the first heart transplant conducted by Dr Christian Bernard in Cape Town, South Africa.

Dr Yahya, who is also the surgeon who performed a bypass on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1989, led the four-hour operation assisted by Datuk Dr Ahmad Saleehuddin, Mohamed Azhari Yaacob, Datuk Dr Mohamed Hassan Mohamed Arif, Dr Sharifah Suraya Syed Mohamed Tahir, Dr Azlina Abdul Jalil, Datuk Dr Robaayah Zambahari, Dr David Chiew Soon Ping, Dr Aizai Azan Abdul Rahman and a group of paramedics.

IJN had been preparing for the transplantation for the last two years and a team of surgeons, cardiologists, anaesthetists, perfusionists and nurses was sent to the Alfred Hospital, Melbourne, Australia, for training attachment in an active transplant unit.

Details of the donor were previously withheld at the request of the family but today Chua revealed that the donor was a 22-year-old Chinese man who had brain tumor and had undergone a surgery.

The man, whose name was still kept secret, had requested that his organs be donated to those in need and his parents had complied with his last wish. Two patients had received his kidneys. He was brain dead when the heart was taken.

Before the transplant, Sathrugnan, who was discharged from the institute on Jan 17, could not even brush his teeth or stand up on his own but could now walk on the treadmill for 12 minutes.

Asked about his plans, Sathrugnan, who had worked in Sulawesi, Indonesia, said he wanted to open a small workshop in his home town.

Chua said about 100 friends and relatives who attended the donor's funeral were so moved by his gesture that they had also pledged to donate their organs.

He said that after the successful transplant, IJN had been receiving

one or two calls daily from the public asking for forms to pledge their hearts.

There are about 20,000 heart patients in the country and about 1,000 of them need a heart transplant.

The first heart recipient, Louis Washkansky, survived for 16 days and the longest and still surviving recipient after 19 years is living in the United States. -- BERNAMA

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