

New heart, new hope for Hui Yi

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KUALA LUMPUR: For one year and four days, she suffered the agony of dragging a 9kg battery pack which powered her mechanical heart.

If she walked a little too fast, pain rocked the 14-year-old's frail body. The gritty girl struggled through myriad of problems and complications.

But on Wednesday, four days after making another tearful plea for a heart, relief arrived.

Tee Hui Yi underwent a successful heart transplant at the National Heart Institute (IJN).

The donor heart was a gift from the family of a 15-year-old Malay accident victim in Ipoh. Tee, however, remains in critical condition.

Doctors took 10½ hours to carry out the first heart transplant at IJN this year.

They began the operation at 10.45pm on Wednesday. The donor's heart was planted into Tee at 1.30am yesterday.

The donor had died in a road accident in Ipoh and had been pronounced brain dead. Upon receiving word, the Royal Malaysian Air Force flew 13 medical officers from IJN on a CN235 aircraft to the Ipoh Hospital to collect the victim's organs.

Also harvested were the teenager's lungs, liver and kidneys.

The teen's lungs benefited a 39-year-old Sabah man with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.

The transplant team, headed

by chief cardiothoracic surgeon Datuk Dr Mohd Azhari Yakub and heart and lung transplant clinical director Dr Mohamed Ezani Md Taib, performed the surgeries simultaneously.

The man's surgery was also a success but, like Tee, he remains in critical condition.

Both were wheeled out of the operating theatres at 9.05am yesterday.

"It was a risky operation and I will not go into details, but Tee has waited for a year and now we'll have to wait and see," said Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek, who was at IJN yesterday morning.

The simultaneous operations involved six cardiothoracic surgeons, six anaesthetists, one physician from the Respiratory Research Institute and 30 paramedics.

"We are very glad that Tee has finally gotten her heart. We extend our gratitude to the victim and the family," Dr Chua said.

When she was just 2 years old, Tee was diagnosed with end-stage heart failure after suffering a viral infection.

Last year on Sept 29, she was fitted with a mechanical heart, or a Thoratec Paracorporeal Ventricular Assist Device.

The 9kg device was implanted outside the abdomen and connected to the left side of the heart and was supposed to last two years.

Tee's parents — Tee Ah Soon and Dina Bato Sambua — were at the hospital when the surgery was done. They, however, did not meet the press.



Tee Hui Yi successfully underwent a heart transplant surgery but her condition remains critical.