

# 'It is a miracle, two hearts in two days'

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Just when the doctors thought Tee Hui Yi's heart transplant was successful, the danger signs appeared.

Her frail body was rejecting the new heart. Pushing aside the fatigue that gnawed at them, the team of doctors at the National Heart Institute (IJN) went into overdrive as they laboured to save Hui Yi.

They pumped drugs into the 14-year-old's body in a bid to coax it to accept the new heart — to no avail. And just when they were giving up hope, good news arrived. Another heart had been found.

The heart was rushed from Johor to the IJN where a team of 34 doctors and paramedic staff operated on Hui Yi again and performed a second transplant.

This time, they were successful. The team, led by IJN chief cardiothoracic surgeon Datuk Dr Mohd Azhari Yakub, sighed with relief.

By yesterday evening, the girl who had been lugging along a 9kg battery pack to power her mechanical heart, was awake.

It was nothing short of a miracle.

However, IJN's heart and lung transplant clinical director Dr Mohamed Ezani Md Taib cautioned: "She is still not out of the woods. We need to monitor her closely for the next 72 hours.

"It's a miracle. Two hearts in two days after waiting for almost 10 months. It's unbelievable. God is great."

Recounting the moments after the first surgery on Thursday, Dr Ezani said: "We were monitoring her closely. After the first hour of the surgery



we found that her body was rejecting the transplanted heart.

"Three hours later, we realised we were facing a serious problem. We had to open her up again at 2pm to find out what was happening."

On opening up her chest, he knew that her transplanted heart had been rejected.

"I was scared stiff. I told Dr Azhari my fears and we were pondering our next course of action, including the possibility of placing Hui Yi back on the mechanical heart, when I got a call around 3pm, saying there was another heart donor," said Dr Ezani.

He said his first question was "What blood group?"

When the reply came that it was "O", Dr Ezani cried out: "Yes, I want the heart."

He informed Dr Azhari.

"It was God's blessing. We did not know whether to jump with joy or not because we had to get the heart first."

Dr Ezani said doctors believe the first heart failed because of antibodies in Hui Yi's immune system.

"I am quite happy to report that Hui Yi's heart is functioning very



Datuk Dr Mohd Azhari Yakub led the surgery team

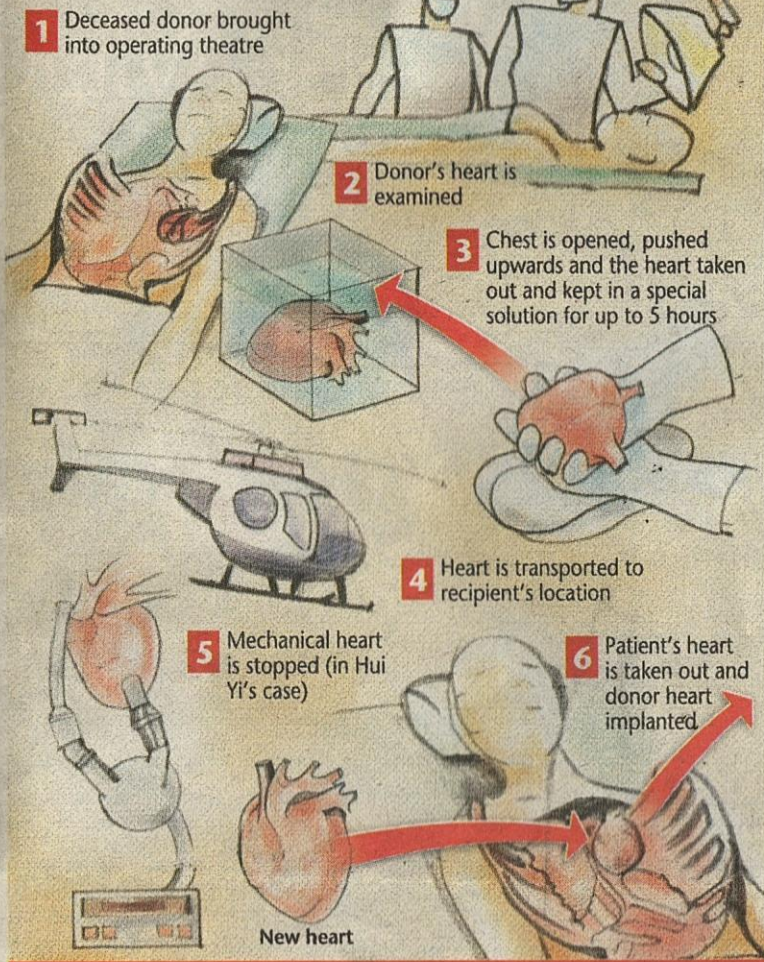
well, with lesser support than the previous surgery."

He said that doctors believe that as a result of Hui Yi's multiple blood transfusions over the past year, she could have developed antibodies that rejected the first heart.

"We are using drugs that suppress her immune system so it will not affect the new organ and we are also making sure that she does not develop an infection."

The second transplant surgery took place yesterday at 1.30am. It lasted 6½ hours, finally ending at

## A TYPICAL HEART TRANSPLANTATION PROCESS



8am. The first transplant operation on Wednesday lasted 10½ hours.

The first donor heart is now being tested to find out why Hui Yi's body rejected it.

IJN deputy head of anaesthesiology Dr Syarifah Suraya Syed Mohd Tahir said although Hui Yi's surgery "went very well", the next two or three days would be crucial.

"She only weighs about 30kg and has barely enough muscle on her and she's had lots of infections. It is going to be difficult for her to cope with the

surgery," she said.

"It remains to be seen whether she can cope. We are hopeful that because she is young, she can overcome, but we are still guarded in our happiness," said Dr Syarifah.

The second donor, like the first, was also an accident victim and he donated his lungs, liver and kidneys.

"The doctors would like to thank both families for the selfless acts," said Dr Azhari. They were also grateful to the RMAF and police for their help in transporting the organs.