

Friday 8 October 2010

EAST TIMORESE TEEN SAYS THANKS FOR THE GIFT OF LIFE

An East Timorese teenager given a lifesaving medical procedure in Australia today thanked her medical team and the Australian public for helping to save her life.

Flavia Lucilda Guterres, 19, is recuperating in Melbourne following a specialised heart procedure that has given her a second chance at life. Ms Guterres suffers from mitral stenosis, the narrowing of a heart valve that can lead to congestive heart failure.

Cardiologist Professor Richard Harper and his team at Southern Health's Monash Heart volunteered their expertise to operate on Ms Guterres following an extraordinary outpouring of generosity by Australians, who donated money to fly the teenager and others in a similar plight to Australia after their cause was publicised.

"I cannot express how happy I am to have this opportunity," Ms Guterres said.

"Before this operation, I was so weak I could not walk more than a few steps, and the doctors told me that I did not have much longer to live.

"Now I am looking forward to getting back to East Timor and finishing my high school certificate so that I can fulfil my ambition of becoming a nurse.

"I won't waste this opportunity. I have been given a second chance at life and I intend to make the most of it."

Professor Harper said the Ms Guterres' procedure was routine in western countries, but unavailable in East Timor, where there is a lack of specialised health care facilities.

Professor Harper is expected to operate shortly on another East Timorese patient suffering from the same condition, Ursula de Carvalho Soares, 17. Southern Health's Monash Heart has pledged to operate on two young East Timorese patients each year.

Ms Guterres thanked the Australians who donated her airfare; the Australian East Timorese community, which has given emotional and practical support; and St John of God Hospital in Warrnambool, which organised a fundraising appeal.

"In East Timor there are many other young people like me who are so sick. Thanks to the generosity of Australians I hope that they too are given the chance to live," she said.

Warrnambool cardiologist Dr Noel Bayley, who has assisted East Timorese patients for many years, including paying for airfares in some cases, said he hoped to raise up to \$100,000 a year to bring three or more young patients to Australia for similar procedures.

Tax deductible donations can be made to the St John of God East Timor Fund, PO Box 316, Warrnambool, 3280.

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