

EAST TIMOR HEARTS FUND

Australians supporting a
healthy Timor-Leste

15 July 2014

Race against time to help teenage Timorese heart patient

An Australian medical aid charity is in a race against time to bring a 14 year old East Timorese girl with critical heart disease to Australia for life-saving heart surgery.

Darwin paediatric cardiologist Dr Bo Remenyi raised the alarm about Ana Clarita Freitas after examining her during a medical mission to Timor-Leste (East Timor) last month. Dr Remenyi sought urgent help from East Timor Hearts Fund, Australia's only medical aid charity dedicated to providing life-saving surgery for young Timorese with heart disease.

Dr Remenyi, who undertakes regular paediatric cardiology trips to Timor-Leste for Rotary Oceania Medical Aid for Children (ROMAC), said Ana Clarita's heart was failing and she had little time without immediate medical assistance.

"Ana Clarita has critical mitral stenosis, a heart valve condition common in Timor-Leste that is caused by childhood rheumatic fever, an inflammatory disease that damages the heart tissue.

"She is likely to have had heart disease for a long time and is very frail. She weighs only 24 kilos.

"One of her heart valves is almost blocked and unable to pump blood effectively. As a result she is very weak, breathless and dizzy. Without intervention her heart will fail, and that could happen at any time."

East Timor Hearts Fund's honorary medical adviser Dr Noel Bayley said the organisation immediately rallied support when it learned of Ana Clarita's situation. Within several days it arranged for eminent cardiologist Professor Richard Harper of MonashHeart to treat Ana Clarita. The fund also arranged transport, accommodation, warm winter clothing and other needs.

Dr Bayley thanked sponsor Toll Remote Logistics for flying Ana Clarita to Australia, and MonashHeart for agreeing to perform the heart valve procedure.

"Ana Clarita's case is distressing and heart-wrenching. By our western standards it seems inconceivable that a child this young could be dying of heart disease, yet that is the reality in Timor-Leste where patients with heart conditions go undiagnosed and untreated because of a lack of medical services.

"The response from the supporters has been nothing short of amazing. We're all very hopeful of a miracle for Ana Clarita."

Ana Clarita, her brother Gregorio, and health support worker Fatima Mendonca from Bairo Pite Clinic in Dili arrived in Australia on Monday 14 July, ahead of Ana Clarita's heart valve procedure on Thursday 17 July.

To donate to assist Ana Clarita and patients like her go to www.easttimorheartsfund.org.au

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