

Thanks so heartfelt

Cure gives Paulo a new life

LUCIE VAN DEN BERG

FOR Paulo Nascimento, just standing still could make his heart hammer as though he were running a marathon.

The East Timorese teenager's congenital heart condition, which caused the muscle to beat three times faster than normal, meant the smallest exertion could exhaust him.

Such a diagnosis, in a country lacking in cardiology services, might have condemned him to a limited life and perhaps an early death.

But thanks to fundraising by Australian medical aid charity the East Timor Hearts Fund, a new life now beckons.

Last week Paulo, 13, had a heart operation at the University Hospital Geelong.

Cardiologist and electrophysiologist Dr Daryl Ridley said: "We are very lucky to live in a country like Australia, and I think it's a real privilege to share some of our good luck with some of our neighbours, like Paulo."

Of the operation, he said: "I felt a bit more pressure, because if the patient was a local resident and they need to have a second procedure for a complete cure, then it's straight-forward. But with Paulo that wouldn't be possible, so I had to do the best job in one go."



Paulo and Victory's Daniel Georgievski. Pic: EUGENE HYLAND

In Paulo's condition, Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, several strands of muscle left over during the heart's development act as additional electrical pathways between the atrium and the ventricle, causing the heart to race.

"It makes you feel very fatigued because your heart is racing at around 170-180 beats per minute," Dr Ridley said.

"It's like you are at maximum exercise but you are standing still. You can get light-headed, tired, and chest pain," he said.

Tiny wires were threaded through a vein in the leg to the

heart, so electrical mapping could pinpoint the muscles causing the problem. Heat was then applied to burn excess muscle and prevent the electrical circuit from recurring.

Now Paulo's heart has been repaired, the soccer fan is looking forward to kicking goals with the best of them once he returns home to Dili.

Last week, he got to attend Melbourne Victory training.

Paulo says Australia is colder than he expected, but the people are warmer than he could ever have imagined.

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