



# PRESS RELEASE

## **KENYA'S FIRST ARTERIAL SWITCH OPEN HEART SURGERY PERFORMED**

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For immediate release

The MEAK heart team from the U.K. and the doctors at Kenyatta National Hospital made history on the 19th of May by carrying out a rare and complicated open heart procedure on a 6-month old boy, the first operation of its kind to take place in all of East Africa.

The boy came to the MEAK clinic in Nairobi from his home in Mombasa via Tanuja Walli, who runs the Paediatric Support Group. The boy, who had been blue since birth, would not have survived more than a few months without surgery. MEAK consulting cardiologist, Dr. Aaron Bell, performed the echocardiogram and discovered a very complex form of transposition of the great artery's, with a large hole (VSD), and severe obstruction to the outlet of the heart. It was imperative that the boy have surgery in order to survive but the necessary procedure, an 'arterial switch', had never before been performed in Kenya and this was a particularly complex situation. "His case was so difficult that even surgeons in a fully equipped modern environment would potentially struggle with the case. After discussions with the team we decided that the best option was to proceed with the arterial switch, closure of the VSD and resection of the sub arterial obstruction", says Dr. Bell.

MEAK's consultant paediatric cardiac surgeon, Mr. David Anderson, stated that he had only seen 4 or 5 similar cases in his 20 years of operating. The child was born with his great arteries the wrong way around. The logical treatment is to disconnect them and reconnect them the right way which is a highly intricate advanced procedure. "It's a big technical challenge even if done in London, the fact that it was done in Kenya was a significant achievement for the team and is a testament to the professional skill of all involved. The most rewarding aspect is that the patient can now look forward to a long and healthy life", says Mr. Anderson.

Local surgeon, Dr. James Munene, who is head of cardiac surgery at Kenyatta National Hospital, was delighted to have been able to participate in this groundbreaking procedure and was first assistant on the case. "The success is a combination of the progressive partnership that has developed between MEAK and KNH. We started with basic congenital surgery and now we are tackling the most complex procedures in this field. The benefits of this partnership extends into all areas of cardiac surgery leading towards Kenyatta's objective of being the centre of excellence in East and Central Africa as far as cardiovascular disease is concerned", noted Dr. Munene.

The operation took 4 hours and the patient was on bypass for a total of 130 minutes. The child came through surgery incredibly well and is making a smooth post operative recovery.

In 2007 the youngest child ever to receive open heart surgery in Kenya was operated on by the MEAK team and local surgeons, when a 3-day old baby received a correction for pulmonary atresia and was coined 'Baby Lucky' by the local press.

MEAK, which stands for Medical and Educational Aid to Kenya, is an NGO which was founded in the UK sixteen years ago by Dee and Mike Belliere. The organisation mainly focuses their efforts on bringing in volunteer medical teams from the U.K. to carry out cardiac, thoracic and orthopaedic surgery, as well as working with local teams to perform ophthalmic surgery in the remote areas of Kenya.

This heart trip marks the teams' 13<sup>th</sup> mission at Kenyatta Hospital and is compiled of a team of 17 doctors nurses, perfusionists and a physiotherapist from U.K. The eight-day mission commenced on the 16th of May and completes on the 24th, by which time they anticipate completing approximately 2 dozen surgical procedures. In total the team has screened over 2,000 children with heart problems and have completed nearly 300 operations. MEAK will be returning to KNH in the autumn of 2009. The organisation also has chapters in Kenya and the United States.

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