New hope for heart disease sufferers

Jul 4, 2012 | Denise Williams Parliamentary Correspondent | 1 comments

THE poorest of the poor suffering from rheumatic heart disease could soon have a new lease of life with ground-breaking technology being researched by the University of Cape Town.

A first of its kind, research currently being conducted by the department of cardiothoracic surgery at Groote Schuur Hospital and the Red Cross Memorial Children’s Hospital, has identified a new technology which will enable doctors to perform heart valve replacement operation without open heart surgery.

Professor Peter Zilla said yesterday the idea stemmed from a realisation that even though globally 33-million people were suffering from HIV-Aids, 70-million were battling rheumatic heart disease, for which a heart valve replacement was needed.

"In the whole of Africa there are about 200000 new serious cases a year. In terms of South Africa there are about 7000 to 10000 [new cases]."
Zilla said developed countries had to spearhead the research as the disease was not prevalent in First World countries.

"Once it is contracted, for the majority the only therapy is to replace the heart valve with a prosthetic [valve]. You don’t find it in the First World, it was eradicated in the 1950s, therefore no First World country lobbied for it,” said Zilla.

He said the survival rate without treatment was also very low, and that a large proportion of people who contracted the disease died young.

"The irony is that it’s precisely those countries, where those70-million live who are poor and have no access to heart surgery."

Zilla said heart valve replacement surgery was being performed. However, because of the costs of the valve and the large surgical team needed, it was not accessible to the poor.

"One of these heart valves alone costs a quarter of a million rand."

A balloon was also used which obstructed the blood flow to and from the heart.

In terms of the envisaged new procedure a plastic valve would be inserted, which would possibly last longer than a tissue valve. It would also have a “self homing” mechanism which would mean that a balloon would not be needed.

Zilla said inventors and researchers, a team from Brazil, Europe, India, China, the US and South Africa had secured patent.

Research was also continuing with a cash injection from the Department of Science and Technology and corporate giant Bidvest.

Zilla said government had paid out R12-million and Bidvest R18-million.

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Great idea. everyone (inc Gov ) must play his/her part to make this a success research by by those involved. Viva Mzansi Viva ! VI........ Report Abuse (?filter=login&articleId=5615179)

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