

Singaporean has Asia's first combined heart, liver swap

April 24 2009, by Bernice Han

A 58-year-old Singaporean pastor is recovering well after undergoing Asia's first simultaneous heart and liver transplant, his medical team said Friday.

The 13-hour surgery, which took place two weeks ago at the Singapore General Hospital (SGH), was needed to treat a rare genetic condition affecting Lau Chin Kwee, the doctors told a news conference.

"Things are looking good. He is doing as well as he can be," said Tan Chee Kiat, director of the [liver transplant](#) programme at the state-run hospital.

Lau suffers from a condition known as familial amyloid polyneuropathy, in which a [gene mutation](#) causes the liver to produce abnormal proteins that affect the nerves.

Eventually, the liver will no longer function properly. Tests showed the pastor's heart had also been affected by the condition, doctors said.

Data available worldwide showed 1,441 liver transplants have been carried out to treat the disorder, with more than half of these in Portugal and France, they said.

Transplants involving both the heart and liver to treat the illness numbered 17 before the pastor's surgery two weeks ago, they said.

Tan said there was no cure for the disease except for a transplant which, in Lau's case, was assessed to have a mortality rate of 30-40 percent.

"He is aware time is running out," said Tan.

More than a dozen surgeons, nurses and anaesthesiologists were on hand for the operation.

Lau, who spoke to the media via webcam from his ward, said he was thankful to be given a chance to live and that his first words after the operation were addressed to God.

"I have nobody to speak to except my God, so first words must be thanksgiving and praises," said Lau, who wore a mask covering the lower part of his face when he spoke to the media.

"I am certainly very, very thankful to be able to wake up on this side of life instead of beyond," he added. "The gift of life is really a miracle."

Doctors declined to say how much Lau's surgery cost.

A spokeswoman for the SGH said a [heart](#) or liver transplant usually costs about 180,00-250,000 Singapore dollars (120,000-166,666 US).

The hospital did not release Lau's personal details, citing medical confidentiality, but he told the media he had three children and would now devote his time to bringing up his youngest child.

"One of the things that God gave me in my old age when I was beyond 50 was a son who is now six years old," said Lau, whose family joined him in his ward midway during his comments to the media.

Lau plans to continue his church work once he has recovered from

surgery.

Singapore is recognised as having one of Asia's best medical systems, attracting thousands of foreigners for surgery, checkups and other treatments.

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