

Hope for Romania baby born with stunted intestines

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This March 27, 2012 file photo shows Baby Andrei, eight-month-old, the son of Roma under-age parents, in the arms of a nurse in the intensive care unit of the Marie Curie children's hospital Bucharest, Romania. Baby Andrei was born with almost no intestines, and has confounded medical opinion by still being alive, and even kicking, 8 months later. Now there's hope for another miracle. The Romanian infant has received offers for a complicated intestine transplant, an operation not performed on babies in Europe, from Harvard and Boston, said the Romanian pediatrician who is in charge of caring for Andrei. (AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda)

(AP) -- Baby Andrei has confounded doctors just by being alive: The tiny boy with twig-thin limbs was given just days to live when he was born with almost no intestines - eight months ago.

Now there's hope for another miracle.

Harvard University and hospitals in Boston have offered to help Andrei get a complicated intestine transplant that isn't performed on babies in Europe, the Romanian [pediatrician](#) in charge of the baby's care said Thursday.

The offers came after an Associated Press story last week chronicled how Dr. Catalin Cirstoveanu, head of the [neonatal unit](#) at Bucharest's Marie Curie children's hospital, flies babies abroad for lifesaving surgery to get around a culture of corruption in which many doctors won't operate unless they're bribed.

AP photographs of Andrei in his incubator generated sympathy around the world, and the doctor said people in Europe and the U.S. have reached out with offers to help fund the expensive surgery.

"Offers of help have come in, particularly from abroad, from a non-governmental organization, and from Boston and Harvard," Cirstoveanu said. "We need to get ID papers, contact his parents, and send faxes and see what is our best option."

The cost of the surgery goes into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, way out of the reach of Andrei's underage Gypsy parents, who live in a poor part of eastern Romania. Romania's average monthly salary is (EURO)350 (\$460).

The bribery culture in Romanian hospitals is so ingrained that nurses expect bribes just to change sheets. Surgeons can get hundreds of euros (dollars) and upward for an operation, while anesthetists get roughly a third of that.

Cirstoveanu runs the cardio unit at Marie Curie. But its state-of-the-art machinery has lain idle because he has banned staff from taking bribes. So he flies sick babies to western Europe on budget flights so they can

get treatment from doctors who won't expect kickbacks.

Andrei, who still weighs less than an average newborn, has just 10 centimeters (4 inches) of intestine, compared to about three meters (yards) for other babies his age. Like them, he has started teething.

He has captured the hearts of his nurses, some of whom played the lottery to try to raise the money needed for surgery in the U.S., which Cirstoveanu hopes the infant will now get for free.

Andrei's parents, who live hundreds of kilometers (miles) away, rarely visit. Nurses take turns cuddling the bony baby, who loves human contact and screws up his face and wails when put back in his incubator.

Andrei's alert gaze and keen interest in the world around him appear at odds with his frail, shrunken frame of just 2.8 kilograms (6.16 pounds). He has grown less than one kilogram (2.2 pounds) since he was born premature on July 27 in the small town of Tecuci.

"He has no muscles or fat on him, but gets annoyed when no attention is paid to him," said Cirstoveanu, who personally oversees the sick baby's development.

Without surgery, he said, Andrei could expect to live for "one, two, three months."

Andrei's parents all but despaired of saving their son when they approached Cirstoveanu for help.

Now, it seems possible.

"He should have been dead by now, but he has another chance," Cirstoveanu said. "But he needs this operation soon. It is very urgent."

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