

Patient 'progressing' after first artificial heart implant in France

December 22 2013, by Laurence Benhamou

A 75-year-old man who this week became the first person to receive an artificial heart developed by French biomedical firm Carmat was progressing well, doctors said Saturday.

The patient was "progressing and recuperating", said surgeon Christian Latremouille, who was among the 16-strong team of doctors who performed the operation at the Georges Pompidou Hospital in Paris on Wednesday.

Artificial hearts have already been in use for many years as a temporary fix for patients with chronic heart problems.

The Carmat product aims at providing a longer-term solution to bridge the wait for a donor heart and enable hospitalised patients to return home and maybe even resume work.

"He was nearing the end of his life," Latremouille told a press conference, adding that the surgery had gone according to plan. "The intervention took place in good conditions... There were no complications linked to the innovative nature of the implant operation," he said.

"He is not walking yet, but we will try to get him sitting and then standing soon enough. The objective is for him to have a normal life."

The artificial heart, a self-contained unit implanted in the patient's chest,

uses soft "biomaterials" and an array of sensors to mimic the contractions of the heart.

The goal is to lessen the risk of blood clots and rejection by the immune system.

The patient will have to wear a belt of lithium batteries to power the heart.

Cardiac surgeon Alain Carpentier, who led the operation and who has spent 25 years working on the development of the artificial heart, said he was grateful to the patient for taking part in the trial. "He has a lot of humour. He's a very good patient," he told reporters.

More volunteers could soon benefit from the 900-gramme (31-ounce) device, according to Philippe Pouletty, who co-founded Carmat with Carpentier.

"A number of patients are being selected. It is likely that other implantations will take place in the coming weeks," he told Europe 1 radio.

The first phase of the trial, on a small group of volunteers in terminal condition, will assess survival one month after the operation, or earlier if the patient receives a natural heart.

"France can be proud of this exceptional effort in the service of human progress," French President Francois Hollande said in a congratulatory letter to the medical team.

Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault turned to Twitter to praise the achievement. "Thank you for the hope and prospects that this feat brings," he wrote.

Nearly 100,000 people in Europe and the United States are in need of a heart transplant, according to Carmat.

A US rival to Carmat, an [artificial heart](#) called AbioCor, is authorised in the United States for patients with end-stage heart failure or life expectancy of less than 30 days, who are not eligible for a natural heart plant and have no other viable treatment options.

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