

World's first successful penis transplant performed in S. Africa (Update)

March 13 2015

South African doctors announced Friday that they had performed the world's first successful penis transplant, three months after the ground-breaking operation.

The 21-year-old patient had his penis amputated three years ago after a botched circumcision at a traditional initiation ceremony.

In a nine-hour operation at the Tygerberg Hospital in Cape Town, he received his new penis from a deceased donor, whose family were praised by doctors.

"We've proved that it can be done—we can give someone an organ that is just as good as the one that he had," said Professor Frank Graewe, head of plastic reconstructive surgery at Stellenbosch University.

"It was a privilege to be part of this first successful penis transplant in the world."

Doctors say the man, whose identity has not been disclosed, has made a full recovery since the operation on December 11 and has regained all urinary and reproductive functions.

"Our goal was that he would be fully functional at two years and we are very surprised by his rapid recovery," said Professor Andre van der Merwe, head of Stellenbosch's urology division.

In 2006, a Chinese man had a penis transplant but his doctors removed the organ after two weeks due to "a severe psychological problem of the recipient and his wife".

Scores of South African teenage boys and young men have their penises amputated each year after botched circumcisions during rite-of-passage ceremonies.

"There is a greater need in South Africa for this type of procedure than elsewhere in the world," Van der Merwe said in a statement.

Dangerous rituals

African teenagers from some ethnic groups spend about a month in secluded bush or mountain regions as part of their initiation to manhood.

The experience includes circumcision as well as lessons on masculine courage and discipline.

A commission last year found 486 boys had died at the winter initiation schools between 2008 and 2013, with a major cause being complications such as infection after circumcision.

"For a young man of 18 or 19 years, the loss of his penis can be deeply traumatic," said Van der Merwe.

"He doesn't necessarily have the psychological capability to process this. There are even reports of suicide among these young men."

Van der Merwe described the anonymous donor and his family as "the heroes" of the story.

"They saved the lives of many people because they donated the heart,

lungs, kidneys, liver, skin, corneas and then the penis," he said.

The South African team included three senior doctors, transplant coordinators, anaesthetists, theatre nurses, a psychologist and an ethicist.

Surgeons from Stellenbosch University and Tygerberg Hospital had searched extensively for a suitable donor as part of a pilot study to develop penis transplants in Africa.

Some techniques were developed from the first facial transplant in France in 2005.

They now plan to perform nine more similar operations.

South Africa has long been a pioneer of transplant surgery.

In 1967, Chris Barnard performed the world's first heart transplant at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town.

The Chinese man who rejected his new penis in 2006 received his transplant after parents of a brain-dead man agreed to donate their son's organ.

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