

# Yeltsin surgery draws attention to Russian medical deficiencies

MOSCOW (AP) — The elite clinic that will oversee Boris Yeltsin's heart bypass operation is a portrait of neglect, from the gloomy, unheated lobby to the many dogs that beg for food at the back door.

"Good medicine requires big money, and we don't have it," says a young emergency room doctor making a reporter through the maze of long halls at the Russian Scientific Cardiological Complex in western Moscow.

"The state of Soviet and now Russian medicine is very bad — all branches, from medical education to surgery — and if anyone says otherwise, he's lying," he adds.

The cardiology clinic is only a small part of this enormous complex of adjoining buildings, constructed in the 1970s in that monumental Soviet style in which everything — doors, corridors, staircases — seems too big.

Today, steam radiators struggle to make the chill off 15-foot-high ceilings with floors of stone and metal to grab a handful of drafty windows, and unattended courtyards are overgrown with grass and weeds.

The cavernous main lobby

where visitors leave their coats and wait in line for passes is dark, its fluorescent lights flickering or dead, and cloudy with cigarette smoke.

Yeltsin, as president, is a special case, of course, and will get the best treatment Russian and foreign specialists can offer. But his decision to have surgery in Moscow has thrown a spotlight on Russia's impoverished medical system, where expensive surgeries like his are rare and doctors and patients alike look abroad for quality. Only a few thousand bypass operations are performed in Russia each year, compared to half a million in the United States.

Yeltsin, 65, will likely be operated on within the next two months, either at the clinic, run by the dean of Soviet cardiology, Dr. Yevgeny Chazov, or at nearby Central Clinical Hospital, also called the Kremlin hospital, where Yeltsin is now being evaluated.

In Soviet times, health care was free but shoddy. Since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, even the elite clinics that cater to VIPs have been gasping for funds.

"The biggest problem is non-payment," says Dr. Leo Bokeria,

who heads another leading Moscow clinic, the Research Center for Cardiovascular Surgery.

"Since we're a state hospital, we're paid 95 or 96 percent by the state, and we've been very badly paid," Bokeria says.

Russia is gripped by a chronic cycle of debt and unpaid wages.

**"The biggest problem is non-payment."**

Dr. Leo Bokeria  
Research for Cardiovascular Surgery

The government can't collect taxes and doesn't pay its bills, and most state workers, from miners to defense workers to teachers, regularly go months without paychecks.

The ER physician, who spoke on condition of anonymity, graduated with honors and considers his posting at the Chazov clinic a prize. Still, he makes only \$100 a month, less than the national average. He sells German pharma-

ceuticals on the side, but he has a wife and young child and worries he may have to quit medicine to make a living.

The president's heart problems have also brought attention to the need for better preventive care in Russia. The Russian diet is fatty, heavy on red meat, sausage and fried potatoes, and alcohol consumption is high. Those factors have helped reduce male life expectancy to 57, a drop of six years since 1991.

The clinic says its kitchen avoids meat and fried foods — Monday's dinner menu listed fish, mashed potatoes and yogurt — but the young doctor calls the bland, institutional offerings "ugly" and patients' families commonly bring meals in for loved ones. Often, they are expected to bring the necessary drugs, too.

"The level of our institute is down," the doctor says grimly, adding that he himself would probably look for treatment abroad.

"In my group (at medical school) we began with about 20 people. I would send my relatives to only one or two of them."

# Artificial heart program gets final push

The device, which has been tested on calves, should be available for human use in four years.

HOUSTON (AP) — A totally implanted artificial heart that has been tested in calves should be ready for human use in four years.

The Texas Heart Institute and ABIOMED Inc., a Massachusetts company, received a 4-year, \$8.5 million federal grant that will allow them to complete testing the battery-powered pump.

Dr. Robert T.V. Kung, senior vice president for research and development at ABIOMED, said the heart is intended for permanent use in humans.

"We intend it to last as long as the person lives," Kung was quoted as saying in Monday editions of the Houston Chronicle.

However, he said, the government contract calls for developing a heart that will last at least five years.

Implanting it will cost less than current heart transplants, ABIOMED officials said. The estimated cost of the artificial heart is \$30,000.

The project calls for testing the

pump in the laboratory for two years, Kung said. The pump has been implanted in calves for as long as four months, he said.

Dr. O.H. Frazier has led the Texas Heart Institute group that has teamed with ABIOMED for the past nine years to perfect a prototype. Frazier is chief of cardiopulmonary transplantation and director of surgical research at the institute.

Frazier said that only the Texas Heart Institute-ABIOMED and Pennsylvania State University artificial heart programs were funded in this final period before human testing begins.

Initially, the artificial heart may be used to keep patients alive until they receive a transplant, he said. That could occur before the year 2000, he said.

The studies were funded by grants from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. The new grant is from the same agency.

The ABIOMED total artificial

heart has two main pumping chambers, batteries and control electronics. It is designed to replace a diseased heart.

Unlike heart-assist pumps that are being used more frequently now, the total artificial heart requires that the person's natural heart be removed.

The total artificial heart takes its place. It is capable of pumping 10 liters of blood per minute and is about the same size as a normal heart — making it appropriate for most adults.

A sealed, miniaturized hydraulic pump and motor system powers the pumping action. External batteries worn by the patient provide power that is transmitted through the skin.

A small transmitter coil placed over the skin sends the power to a receiver coil that is implanted just under the skin.

Electronics control the rate at which the heart beats as well as how much blood is pumped.

## ACCIDENT

Continued from Page 1

Dr. Andy Smith, a psychologist at the counseling center, said students are free to visit with a counselor if they need to talk about their emotions.

"We are available to you at any time," Smith said. "We are there for you Monday through Friday (from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.), but if not during business hours, you can call our help line."

The help line may be reached by dialing 696-2700.

Sunday's accident occurred on Highway 6 between Old Reliance Road and Highway 21. The Ford F-150 carrying the 10 students reportedly veered to the left lane of the highway. It then crossed back to the right where

it ran off the road, rolled over at least twice and hit a large highway sign. It came to a rest upside down.

Gregory Christopher White, 19, a sophomore civil engineering major from Austin, was killed in the accident.

The nine other students in the truck were sent to St. Joseph's Hospital and Columbia Medical Center.

Charles David McCleod Jr., 19, a sophomore electrical engineering major from Lubbock and Kelly Rene Tyler, 19, a sophomore interdisciplinary studies major from Colleyville were both listed in critical condition at St. Joseph's Monday night.

Stephen Arthur Bowels, 18, a freshman business administration major from Universal City, Jeffrey Russell Flinn, 18, a freshman computer engineering major from Fort Worth, and Jennifer Lynn Luffy, 18, a chemical engineer-

ing major from Fort Worth, were listed in stable condition at St. Joseph's.

In stable condition at Columbia Medical Center Monday night were Melissa Lovoi, 18, a freshman geography major from Beaumont, Sandra Karen Strickland, 18, a freshman business administration major from Fort Worth, and Rebecca E. Wallman, 18, a sophomore biomedical science major from Colleyville.

The driver of the truck, Sarah Marie Fullen, 19, a sophomore history major from Colleyville, was released Monday from Columbia Medical Center.

Monday night, Sgt. Choya Walling of the Bryan Police Department said it was still too early in the investigation to speculate about the cause of the accident.

"All we know now is that the truck left the roadway," Walling said. "A lot of things are depending on the investigation."

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