Artificial heart implantation, and other combined heart operations.

In the late 1960s, R. Benetis was appointed the head of the Heart Surgery Clinic in Kaunas. In short time he introduced a number of new operations such as heart and lung transplantations, application of homotransplants as valve prostheses, surgery of aorta and its branches, and other procedures in various parts of the world were introduced in Vilnius and Kaunas, including the Lithuanian first successful heart transplantation which was performed by R. Benetis and his colleagues in a private clinic in Kaunas in 1979.

Heart surgeons from Vilnius in cooperation with physicians of Vilnius 1st Factory, developed an artificial lung ventilation device which allowed to improve the perfusion techniques (A. Baublys and others). Nowadays, every hospital has its own team of specialists to perform these procedures.

The data of the defended dissertations suggest that the country has developed a research-based strategy for the treatment of ischemic heart disease. And in 2006, professors A. Marcinkevičius, V. Sirvydis, and G. Uždavinys were awarded the National Prize for their contributions to the understanding of heart diseases and more effective treatment results, and make Lithuania's contribution to scientific progress.

Today, Lithuanian cardiologists and cardio surgeons in Vilnius, Kaunas and Klaipėda work together to introduce new treatment methods and collective effort to analyse reasons behind each failure provide grounds for deeper understanding of heart diseases with the aim of finding new solutions.

In the years of Independence, Vilnius is becoming a regional center of the heart care. The first open heart operations in Lithuania, during which artificial blood circulation was used, were performed by A. Marcinkevičius and his colleagues in 1964. On 14 October 1964, A. Marcinkevičius and his colleagues with the participation of E. Meshalkin carried out the first open heart operation during which artificial blood circulation was used. In May 1965, the artificial heart was placed in a human being for the first time in Vilnius.

In 2003, Vilnius Medical University received the status of a private health institution providing treatment for heart conditions. The doors of the most advanced world clinics have opened to Lithuanian heart surgeons, allowing them to participate in various international events and congresses. The Lithuanian Heart Surgery Centre has established cooperation with world leading clinics.

The development of arythmologic surgery. Another surgeon, A. Dumčius grew simultaneously with Prof. J. Brėdikis. In 1989, for some time he worked as a heart surgeon in J. Brėdikis’ clinics in Kaunas, but later worked shortly in Sweden and England. Upon his return to Lithuania, R. Benetis was elected the head of the Heart Surgery Clinic in Kaunas. In short time he introduced a number of new operations such as heart and lung transplantations, application of homotransplants as valve prostheses, surgery of aorta and its branches, and other combined heart operations.

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During their stay in Russia, A. Dumčius and his colleagues could learn the subtleties of artificial blood circulation from Dr. J. Stundžia, and take part in open heart operations during which artificial blood circulation was used. During their stay in Novosibirsk, a group of 23 doctors and nurses participated in specialisation courses at Deborah Heart and Lung Centre in New Jersey, USA. Lithuanian surgeons from the most advanced world clinics gain experience and new surgical skills, as all these surgeons used to participate in various operations performed by A. Marcinkevičius.

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Lithuania has a long history of heart surgery (cardiac surgery), which should first of all be associated with the Fraternity of Vilnius Surgeons. Its 500th anniversary was celebrated in 2009.

After the first successful open heart procedure in Lithuania, the first open heart operation was performed in Vilnius in 1958. J. Brėdikis and his colleagues continued to perform surgeries on open heart by focusing his efforts on the construction of artificial blood circulation experts under the leadership of D. Melrose. This means that surgeons in Kaunas and Vilnius turned to their work. Medical doctors from Kaunas such as S. Pavilionis, K. Katilius, A. Sučila, V. Girdzijauskas, J. Jocius, and S. Stankus, well known for their scientific research and perfect surgical techniques, worked there in the Fraternity of Vilnius Surgeons. In Kaunas, Associate Professor V. Kuzma, associate professor K. Katilius, surgeon B. Efrosas became top-rated surgeons in Vilnius, while associate professor K. Kaliauskas and assistant professor K. Kaliauskas, surgeons, did many other surgeries which were considered leading surgeons in Kaunas. Percent of talented young surgeons keep increasing.

Cardiac surgery progressed rapidly in the cities of Vilnius and Kaunas universities, where a large number and a great variety of open heart operations were performed for the first time.

Because of a large number of young and talented surgeons and proactive medical students there was an opportunity to perform vascular and cardiac surgical procedures. In 1952, the first open heart operation in Lithuania was performed by B. Efrosas. In 1953, J. Jocius removed a needle from a heart, and in 1954, he introduced hypothermia which made open heart surgery possible. These achievements provided the basis for experimental modelling of heart diseases and their surgical treatment. The first surgeries were done to treat congenital heart defects, and hypothermia was introduced, which made open heart surgery possible. Despite the prevalent opinion that the surgeon’s knife would never touch the human heart, L. Rehn, a German surgeon, successfully repaired a stab wound to the heart on 9 September 1895.

The very first successful operation on heart not only in Lithuania but in East Europe was performed by the famous professor A. Dirsė in Vilnius University and Kaunas Medical Institution. Two departments at Vilnius University – one of them was the Cardiac and Vascular Surgery Laboratory and another was the Cardiac Surgery Laboratory. In these laboratories experimental models were established at Vilnius University and Kaunas Medical Institution. Two departments at Vilnius University – one of them was the Cardiac and Vascular Surgery Laboratory and another was the Cardiac Surgery Laboratory.

The rapid progress in medical sciences in the 19th century created conditions for the heart surgery development in Kaunas. It could be noticed that the first open heart operations in Moscow and Leningrad were performed by surgeons who had returned from skills improvement practice in the leading clinics in Moscow and Leningrad. Successful surgical teams performed closed heart operations in Moscow and Leningrad. Soon the leaders turned to their work with enthusiasm to extend the range of closed heart surgery procedures.

One of the most famous cardiac surgeons in Kaunas was Prof. J. Jocius. After accumulating enough experience in closed cardiac surgery and with the assistance of Prof. G. Marcinkevičius, he started closed heart surgery procedures in September 1958. He operated on a number of patients with rheumatic heart disease, mitral valve stenosis, atrial septal defect, patent ductus arteriosus, and coarctation of the aorta. He introduced hypothermia and closed heart surgery procedures.

During World War II, many excellent medical doctors left Lithuania to settle in the West, while the rest were deported to Siberia. The war broke out at the faculty of collective of Vilnius University after the war. The first successful open heart operation in Lithuania was performed by B. Efrosas in Vilnius University and Kaunas Medical Institution.

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