



News Release

Public Relations

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14-Year-Old Girl Survives 118 Days without a Heart at Holtz Children's Hospital

Miami, FL – Fourteen-year-old D'Zhana Simmons was kept alive for 118 days with a custom-made total artificial heart while awaiting a second transplant at Holtz Children's Hospital at the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Medical Center. She is believed to be the first pediatric patient to survive without a heart while her circulation was supported with the unique device.

D'Zhana's heart condition began earlier this year when she began having pain on the left side of her abdomen. After being transferred to several hospitals in South Carolina where she lives, she was diagnosed with dilated cardiomyopathy – a condition where a person's heart becomes weak and enlarged and can no longer pump blood efficiently. She was flown to Holtz for specialized care. Holtz Children's Hospital is one of the largest children's hospitals in the southeastern United States and is a national leader in several pediatric specialties, including organ transplantation and cardiology. Holtz offers every type of solid-organ transplantation and is one of only three centers in the nation that performs multi-organ transplants as part of its Miami Transplant Institute.

D'Zhana received her first heart transplant on July 2nd. But just days after the transplant, the new heart was not functioning and the donated organ had to be removed. On July 4th, the pediatric cardiac surgery team at Holtz removed the first donor organ and implanted a custom-made total artificial heart to keep D'Zhana alive until a new heart could be found.

"I just told my daughter, 'God has a special heart for you and he will deliver it to you when he is ready,'" said Twolla Anderson, D'Zhana's mother.

While the artificial heart was keeping D'Zhana alive, her body still struggled. For more than three months, she fought off infections and was extremely weak.

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She received a second heart transplant on October 29th – 118 days after the artificial heart was implanted. D’Zhana also suffered renal failure after her first transplant and on October 30th, the day after she received her new heart, she received a new kidney as well.

“What makes Holtz unique is that we offer comprehensive care in a multitude of specialties all under one roof,” said Marco Ricci, M.D., director of Pediatric Cardiac Surgery at UM/Holtz. “We have physicians from virtually every specialty available at all times to care for our patients.”

Holtz Children’s Hospital at the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Medical Center is one of the largest children's hospitals in the Southeast United States. Through its experienced medical and support staff, including some of the top pediatricians in the nation, the 254-bed facility provides research and treatment for a wide range of pediatric medical specialties including diabetes, hematology/oncology, bone marrow transplant, cardiology and cardiac surgery, infectious diseases/immunology, transplantation and gastroenterology.

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