
First American ALung Implant At UPMC



The University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) announced last week that it had implanted a device to assist the breathing of a lung transplant patient who was too ill to undergo immediate transplant surgery. The Hemolung Respiratory Assist System allowed the patient's blood to receive oxygen until he was well enough to endure a double-lung transplant a month later. It was the first time such a device had been implanted in the US.

The Hemolung Respiratory Assist System

The Hemolung Respiratory Assist System implant was given to a patient suffering from cystic fibrosis, which attacks the lungs and causes severe breathing problems. Jon Sacker, 33, arrived at UPMC from Oklahoma in February after the failure of a previous lung transplant. However, doctors quickly determined that he was critically ill and not strong enough to undergo transplant surgery.

Instead, they appealed to the FDA for emergency approval to implant the breathing assistance device. Mr. Sacker's second transplant took place approximately a month after the Hemolung device was implanted, and he will remain hospitalised in Pittsburgh during his months-long recovery. Doctors credit the implant with saving the patient's life while he regained his strength for the second lung transplant operation.

ALung Seeks FDA Approval

The maker of the Hemolung Respiratory Assist System is ALung Technologies Inc., based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The company was founded in 1997 as a spinout from the University of Pittsburgh by William Federspiel and the late former chief of lung transplants at UPMC, Dr. Brack Hattler.

ALung is currently seeking approval for the Hemolung device from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA); the approval to use the device in the recent UPMC procedure came as a result of emergency approval by the FDA and an internal review by the hospital. Last year, it received marketing approval in Europe.

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