

PRESS RELEASE

**MALTESE WOMAN RECEIVES LUNG TRANSPLANT**

**Maria (not her real name) is the first Maltese to receive a lung transplant in Italy.** She was suffering from severe pulmonary fibrosis, which had progressed to end-stage respiratory failure. A lung transplant was her only hope. This type of operation is not available in Malta, but was made possible thanks to an agreement, signed in November 2011, among the Government of Malta, the Italian Ministry of Health, Italy's National Transplant Center (CNT) and Sicily's Regional Transplant Center (CRT).

The agreement provides for collaboration in education and patient care in the fields of end-stage organ failure and transplantation. As provided for by the agreement, Sicily's Regional Transplant Center receives organs procured in Malta (18 since the agreement was signed), and patients needing a lung transplant can receive care at ISMETT (the Mediterranean Institute for Transplantation and Advanced Specialized Therapies), in Palermo. "The lung transplant performed in Palermo on a Maltese patient is an important sign," said **Alessandro Nanni Costa**, director of Italy's National Transplant Center, "and is also direct testimony of an integrated network based on collaboration among Mediterranean countries."

**The transplant required enormous organizational effort, both in Malta and Sicily.** The woman, in extremely critical condition, was urgently admitted to the Mater Dei Hospital, in Malta, where she was intubated and mechanically ventilated. Doctors in Malta then asked their colleagues in Palermo to evaluate the different therapeutic options. ISMETT physicians, considering Maria's critical condition, flew to Malta, with the immediate aid of Sicily's Emergency Medical Service, which has a large helicopter available for this type of situation. **The physicians then connected her to an ECMO device, an extracorporeal membrane oxygenator, which provides respiratory support, the only therapeutic option that would allow her to survive.** After her conditions stabilized, her transfer to ISMETT was organized. Effective organizational efforts then allowed Maria to be very quickly transferred to ISMETT via Sicily's Emergency Medical Service helicopter.

The life-saving transplant was performed a few days after her arrival in Palermo. Considering her extremely critical condition, lungs mismatched in size were used, necessitating a **lobe transplant**. A lobe transplant is surgery in which both lungs are reduced in size, and only two lobes, instead of the entire organ, are transplanted. This is a very complex type of surgery, and requires the highest levels of attention to preserve the lungs' functional integrity. "The transplant," said **Alessandro Bertani**, director of ISMETT's lung transplant program, "was complex. We had to deal with the downsizing of the graft and the fact that the patient was on ECMO, and in critical condition. Though she went through a long recovery, Maria is now well and has been discharged; with the necessary follow-up tests in Palermo completed, she has returned home, where she will continue to be followed by Maltese physicians, in collaboration with ISMETT."

“Over the years, ISMETT has perfected extremely innovative and advanced therapeutic approaches for the care of end-stage organ failure, available in only a few centers worldwide,” says ISMETT Director **Bruno Gridelli**. “In this case, the combination of artificial organs (ECMO), the transfer of the critically ill patient, and the transplant of the downsized lobes are evidence of the high level of safety and care provided at ISMETT, and its role as ambassador of good health care in the world.” “We are proud of the accomplishments of Sicily's Regional Transplant Center and ISMETT, both of which are a point of reference for the Mediterranean Transplant Network (MTN), an intergovernmental network pursuing the development of organ donation and transplant activities in Mediterranean countries,” said Nanni Costa.

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+393358203814

**Press Office:** Serena Pizzo