



Cuba's Hospitals Victimized by US Blockade.

JOSE A. DE LA OSA AND JUVENAL BALAN (photos)



EFFORTS HAVE BEEN STEPPED UP TO MAKE IT HARDER FOR CUBA TO OBTAIN MEDICINES AND DEVICES USED TO TREAT CHILDREN WITH HEART DISEASES.

Havana's William Soler Pediatric Hospital, opened 21 years ago by Fidel Castro primarily to treat children with congenital heart malformations, is denied the ability to import needed medicines or devices by the US Treasury Department under the nearly half century US blockade on Cuba. Sometimes these products are made only by US companies or subsidiaries.

The first sign of the recently stepped up measure to block the sale to Cuba came with the ban on sales of catheters and other devices by AGA and NUMED companies to the pediatric hospital's Cardiocenter, used by specialists to perform the technique known as interventionist catheterization.

This advanced minimally invasive procedure is practiced with very good results at the Cardiocenter to close gaps between heart cavities and in the dilation of narrow heart valves among other problems. The treatment prevents patients from having to undergo "open heart" surgery.

The director of the "William Soler" Cardiocenter, Dr. Eugenio Selman-Housein Sosa, and professors Herminia Palenzuela Lopez (center) and Dunia Benítez Ramos, explained to *Granma* newspaper how the hardened US blockade is affecting health care.

Sources from the Ministry of Public Health note that since 2006 the US Department of Commerce began to list Cuba's most important hospitals as blacklisted facilities, in a new attempt to strangle the development of medical attention on the island.

"This is not a political problem," said cardiovascular surgeon Dr. Eugenio Selman-Housein Sosa, director of the "William Soler" Cardiocenter, "but an ethical humane and moral one," which in his opinion speaks poorly of the US government.

The specialist pointed out that since the end of 2006; changes within the license mechanisms established by the US Treasury Department have been taking place to prevent the purchase of sets of instruments, equipment and medicines by his medical institution.

In it's more than two decades of existence the "William Soler" Cardiocenter, of the National Cardio-pediatric Network set up under the Ministry of Public



CHILDREN WITH CONGENITAL HEART MALFORMATIONS RECEIVE FREE MEDICAL ATTENTION AT THE PRESTIGIOUS HAVANA CARDIOCENTER.

Health's Mother-Child Program, has made it possible to achieve a 75% drop in the child mortality rate due to heart ailments. This has led to the incorporation of hundreds of children to normal life, many of whom are now adults.

More than 6,500 heart surgeries have been performed at the center since 1986 including operations on newborns, 60% of which have been carried out with the "open heart" technique.

The prestigious pediatric institution shows internationally acknowledged achievements in the treatment of congenital cardiovascular anomalies and also in the introduction of new diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitation techniques. A fruit of these efforts are the many scientific, teaching and research papers presented by its specialists at national and international congresses and events.



Niñas y niños con malformaciones congénitas del corazón son atendidos gratuitamente en el prestigioso Cardiocentro habanero.

It's no wonder then that Washington systematically denies visas to the center's professionals to attend scientific meetings in the US, citing the time worn pretext that "their entry could be detrimental to US Interests."

Such is the case of two outstanding scientists from the "William Soler", professors Herminia Palenzuela Lopez, a specialist in Cardiopediatrics, and the center's medical deputy director, and Dunia Benítez Ramos, a specialist in charge of cardiovascular intensive care for children.

The two specialists maintain that the prohibitions on Cubans attending international conferences held in the US are "immoral" and "anti-ethical." These exchanges are essential to all specialists, and especially to those devoted to cardiology and pediatric cardiac surgery, which requires systematic updating and training, stressed Dr. Palenzuela.

Evidently, in a highly sensitive issue such as this one, the blacklisted hospitals and prohibition on visas for physicians are part of the US government's web of criminal actions taken under the dark cloak of its seemingly endless blockade against Cuba.

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