



Doctor says Russian teen likely to regain use of limb

Valya Andreeva is on the road to walking again since undergoing a 4½-hour surgery last week to save her right leg.

Andreeva, who was raised in a Russian orphanage and has been featured in *The Bee*, suffered a compound fracture when struck by a motorcycle in her native country in August 2006.

She didn't get timely medical attention and Russian doctors who attempted to mend the broken bones gave up, saying they would have to amputate.

Sonora-based Russian Orphan Rescue Inc. and the Medical Relief Foundation of Modesto arranged to bring her to the United States in February.

According to her rescuers, the 19-year-old got the best surgery money could buy Thursday at Doctors Medical Center. The surgery and hospitalization costs, estimated at more than \$100,000, were covered by the hospital, medical supply companies and Dr. John Casey, a Modesto orthopedist who led the surgical team.

Andreeva was relieved finally to have the surgery, which should allow her to walk normally again.

"She started crying when she was back in her room," said Patrick Day of the nonprofit Russian Orphan Rescue. "She is saying she can't believe it is actually done."

The complex surgery took longer than anticipated and involved the latest in orthopedic medicine. Casey is giving her better than a 70 percent chance of regaining full use of the leg.

"The big thing now is to see if the bones will heal and the growth protein they put in there will work," said Graham Pierce, president of the Medical Relief Foundation and regional director of PHI Air Medical Inc., the air ambulance that contracts with Doctors. "She is supposed to start physical therapy in six weeks, and by then we should know if the bone is healing."

Andreeva has been in danger of losing the leg because the infected ends of the broken bones didn't grow back together.

The surgical team did extensive work to prepare bone grafts and reinforce the fibula and tibia, and packed the bone grafts with a growth protein to promote healing.

First, Casey cut through the back of the leg, bypassing nerves and arteries, to take out a small section of the fibula. He then took a small piece of her hip to graft to the bone.

He later drove a stainless steel rod through the tibia, the largest bone in the lower leg, to give her support between the knee and ankle. Plates and screws were used to secure everything.

Casey told Day that he persuaded a medical supply company to donate the growth protein, at a cost of \$5,000.

Andreeva had nausea from the antibiotics and the pain medication she was given after the surgery, but otherwise is doing well, Day said.

She is expected to be released from the hospital today or Monday, and will recuperate in the Sonora home of Patrick and Barbara Day. She can't put any weight on the leg for five or six weeks. She then is scheduled for physical therapy, donated by a Tuolumne County practice, to help her walk again.

If all goes well, she plans to return to Russia in August.

The young woman has been showered with gifts since her story appeared March 10 in The Bee.

A Sonora dentist filled six cavities in her teeth and an optometrist donated an examination and eyeglasses. Other folks gave clothes or shopping money.

Andreeva was raised in an orphanage in Supazhoke, a town that's a five-hour drive south of Moscow. Because many who leave Russian orphanages live on the streets, Sonora's Russian Orphan Rescue runs a home in the city of Ryazan to mentor young women like Andreeva and help them get into college. It is building a home for young men near the Supazhoke orphanage and is starting another home in Ukraine.

"This whole experience has reignited my faith in people," Day said. "It is unbelievable how generous people are in this area."

For more information on Russian Orphan Rescue Inc. and the Medical Relief Foundation, go to www.russianorphanrescue.org and www.mrfusa.org.

Bee staff writer Ken Carlson can be reached at kcarlson@modbee.com or 578-2321.