

## **Health minister shows his heart; One of B.C.'s first heart-transplant patients is a longtime friend of Health Minister George Abbott**

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Health Minister George Abbott's speech to mark the 20th anniversary of heart transplant surgery in B.C. started off with the usual platitudes and ministerial congratulations about a program that has given new hearts to 325 people since 1988.

"This is a special day -- the 20th anniversary of heart transplants in B.C. -- and this is a tremendous team that is making a great difference and the people of B.C. are grateful for the work they do," Abbott said Tuesday, nodding toward the surgeons and researchers gathered in a small theatre in the basement of St. Paul's Hospital.

But then it all went off-script and the minister struggled to retain his composure as his address turned to the subject of his longtime friend and former neighbour Tony Beeftink, sitting just a few feet away.

"It's a special day for me personally because one of the first recipients of a heart transplant was my friend, Tony ...." Abbott faltered here and turned away from the mike, unable to speak.

When he found his voice, he managed to say he had promised himself he wouldn't get emotional, "but I seem to be losing that particular edge."

He's known Beeftink and his family for more than 25 years. "He taught all my kids in school," said Abbott, who lives in Sicamous.

"He's a great friend and a wonderful member of the community and in 1988 we almost lost him. But thanks to the transplant program Tony lived and he's had an opportunity to make a huge difference to everyone's lives in the Shuswap," he said.

"Tony's been a gift to the Shuswap and it's all the good people in this room that has made that gift possible," said Abbott, who later hugged Beeftink.

Beeftink's family was present, and he spoke of his gratitude for being able to live with a transplanted heart for the last 20 years. It has allowed him to watch his three children grow up, and he's now about to become a grandfather, he said.

Last weekend, St. Paul's performed its 200th heart transplant, and BC Transplant executive director Bill Barrable urged the public to register as organ donors, noting that without donations, there could be no heart transplant program.

The first heart transplants, including Beeftink's, were performed at Vancouver General Hospital in 1988 before the program was switched to St. Paul's. The world's first heart transplant was in 1967 in South Africa.

Dr. Bruce McManus, director of Providence Heart and Lung Institute at the hospital, said heart failure costs the Canadian economy \$20 billion a year and is the leading cause of hospitalization. He said researchers are trying to develop an artificial heart and at St. Paul's, researchers are trying to find a way to use blood and urine tests to monitor organ rejection problems.

In the audience was Carrie Jung, 43, an English teacher at North Vancouver's Capilano University, who had a transplant in 2002. A competitive sprinter, she can do the 100 metres in 15 seconds. "I'd really like to get it down to 14," she said.

She has competed in the World Transplant Games. This year, she decided to try her luck against ordinary athletes and entered the 100-metre sprint at the Canadian Masters Track and Field in Regina. She finished second.

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