

Lester C. Permut, the surgeon in charge of Sophia and Sergei's cases. The Westchester Medical Center is providing its services without charge to the children's families.

Dr. Permut said that Sophia and Sergei suffer from two of the most common heart disorders in children and that in the United States, the prognosis for such cases is excellent; a 95 percent survival rate after surgery.

"In this country, we consider these kinds of pediatric heart surgeries very routine operations," he said.

But in Russia, children having surgery to correct congenital heart defects have only a 5 percent chance of survival because advanced pediatric heart care is not available there. As Olga Victorovna Ovchionikova, Sophia's mother, explained through an interpreter: "I was told my child could have surgery in Novosibirsk, but that it was highly experimental and there were no guarantees. Then we heard about this. It was like a miracle."

It is the first time that the Children's Hospital at the Westchester Medical Center—one of only about 10 hospitals in the state licensed for pediatric heart surgery—is taking part in the Children's Foundation program. More than 100 children each day are cared for at the center here, which has the region's only pediatric intensive care and neonatal intensive care centers. Next year, the Medical Center plans to complete construction of its new 257,500-square-foot, four-story Children's Hospital.

At the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York earlier this year, Anton Kozhedub, 3, of Ukraine and Maria Lucia Miller and Merolyn Roario, infants from the Dominican Republic, underwent heart surgery. Mr. Fugazy said those medical procedures, like the others that have been performed, "have opened avenues not there before and created new friendships."

In particular, Police Commissioner Howard Safir of New York City and law enforcement officials from the Dominican Republic have since exchanged information that has aided in arresting criminals. And pharmaceutical companies are exploring new business venues in the Dominican Republic. Also, George Steinbrenner, the principal owner of the Yankees, helped finance a hospital in the Dominican Republic, a country that is a rich source for American baseball teams.

In the latest partnership with Siberia, the most immediate and palpable gain is Sergei's speedy recovery. A hole in his heart has been repaired and he is making satisfactory progress, Carin Grossman, a hospital spokeswoman, said.

Dr. Permut, who performs about 150 open-heart procedures a year, explained that the wall that should have formed between the lower left and right chambers of Sergei's heart did not completely close when Sergei was in the womb—resulting in an abnormal blood flow and increased pressure in the artery that goes through his lungs.

Before the operation, the blood pressure in the artery to Sergei's lungs was the same as that in his aorta, when it should have been one-fourth of the pressure. It has, however, finally begun to drop, but not to the level it should be.

Under ideal circumstances, the surgery should have been performed before Sergei reached 6 months. "It is already late to start fixing the problem," Dr. Permut said.

Sergei's lungs have suffered, although the damage is probably reversible, Dr. Permut said. Without the surgery, or a heart-lung transplant later on, Sergei would have lived only into his teenage years or perhaps until he was 20.

In contrast, Sophia is undergoing a correction of a hole between the two upper chambers of her heart at precisely the correct time in her life, Dr. Permut said. Her medical problem is less complex than Sergei's, although the mitral valve in her heart needs to be repaired as well. Without surgery, she might not have lived past her 20's, he said.

In interviews last week, Sophia's mother, Mrs. Ovchinnikova, and Sergei's mother, Yulia Sergeevna Yurinskaya, said they had been overwhelmed by the kindness New Yorkers have shown to them and their children.

"They've treated us like family," Mrs. Yurinskaya, a housekeeper at a Siberian factory said, speaking through Dr. Gregory Rozenblit, a director of the department that performs angioplasties at the Medical Center. Sergei's bed is littered with toy trucks and other presents from well-wishers.

Mrs. Yurinskaya is able to talk by phone every day to her husband Mikhail, who also works in a factory in Siberia, and to her parents and in-laws. "They were very worried about the baby, and at first they were crying because everything was so bad. But now they are crying because they're so happy."

Sophia lives with her mother, aunts and grandmother in a small town in Siberia. Ms. Ovchinnikova, a single mother who works as a housekeeper in a gym, said she talks to her relatives only about once a week at a pre-arranged time and place from the United States, because there is no phone in their apartment in Siberia.

When they do talk (the news from Siberia is that the snow has already begun to fall) the women discuss their new hopes for Sophia and changing relations between the two countries.

"We can't believe what is happening," Ms. Ovchinnikova said, "that after all these years of cold war tensions, there is now so much friendliness."

Sophia is awaiting surgery, and since their arrival in the United States, Sophia and her mother have lived in a small apartment here provided by the hospital, so that Sophia can recuperate from a cold and ear infection.

REMARKS IN SUPPORT OF H.R.
3075

HON. ROBERT A. WEYGAND

OF RHODE ISLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 18, 1999

Mr. WEYGAND. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3075, the Medicare, Medicaid, and SCHIP Balanced Budget Refinement Act of 1999 and urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important measure.

With a wide majority of my colleagues, I voted for the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (BBA) after it emerged from the conference committee two years ago while I opposed earlier versions of the bill. The final draft of the BBA accomplished many positive things for our seniors and our country. It expanded preventative benefits, such as increased access to mammographies and other cancer screenings, greatly increased health care access to children through the SCHIP program and enacted several strong anti-fraud and abuse provisions within the Medicare program.

Since the enactment of this broad and comprehensive legislation, I have been working

hard to smooth out some of the provisions which have caused concern for the many health care providers and Medicare beneficiaries in my state. During consideration of the budget resolution for last year, I offered an amendment which called on Congress to restore some of the inequitable reductions to home health care agencies as a result of the Balanced Budget Act. My amendment to the Congressional Budget Resolution was approved and represented the first legislative action on the road to the eventual restoration of some of the reimbursement rate reductions for home health care agencies in last year's omnibus budget bill.

A great number of us recognized last year that much more needed to be done for health care providers and seniors, which is why I am pleased that we are finally debating this bill on the floor. I am disappointed, however, that the majority has chosen to consider this measure by suspending the rules, barring members from offering amendments. Although this legislation will pass by a wide margin today, we cannot rest on this accomplishment. We need to continue working to bridge the differences between what is included in this piece of legislation and what has been included in a separate measure in the other body. As with any comprehensive piece of legislation, there are provisions about which I have concerns within this bill and would prefer certain provisions of the bill awaiting action by the other body. While the Senate and we both intend to provide much needed resources to health care providers in our states, we have understandably taken different approaches and offered different solutions.

I look forward to continuing working with my colleagues in both chambers and the administration to ensure we enact positive relief before the end of this session of Congress.

TRIBAL SELF-GOVERNANCE
AMENDMENTS OF 1999

SPEECH OF

HON. DALE E. KILDEE

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 17, 1999

Mr. KILDEE. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be a cosponsor of this important legislation. Last year, the House passed similar legislation.

Since 1992, the Indian Health Service has transferred more than \$400 million to 211 tribes in Alaska and 38 tribes in the lower 48 States under the self-governance demonstration project.

The transfer of programming and budgeting authority to tribal governments has proven to be successful. Tribes have made significant progress in meeting the needs of their people and promoting the growth of their communities.

It is our responsibility to support the tribes' efforts improving their health care systems. The demonstration project has allowed tribes to expand their range of health care services to their membership.

I strongly urge each of my colleagues to support this bill.