

Transplantoux: climbing Mont Ventoux in “extra time”

Mont Ventoux + Transplant = Transplantoux

Each year more than a thousand Belgian patients are informed they will need a new organ as their only chance of survival. A transplant can be hard on the body and mind but after a successful transplant people are able to live a normal life again. A healthy lifestyle and regular physical activity can have a positive influence on the long-term results of transplantation. To promote physical activity after transplantation, the Transplantoux Foundation was started at the KU Leuven and University Hospitals, Leuven, Belgium by Prof Diethard Monbaliu and colleagues.

This foundation aims to organise positive awareness about organ transplantation, motivate transplant patients to exercise in a healthy way and stimulate multi-disciplinary scientific research to improve the long-term outcome after transplantation.

One positive campaign organized by the Transplantoux Foundation includes cycling and hiking on Mont Ventoux, Vaucluse in France. So this year in June, for the fifth time Mont Ventoux was climbed in one day – although with six months of preparation. Almost 70 transplanted ambassadors of Transplantoux took part – cyclists and 15 walkers. For some there was no better way to prove how well they live their lives in extra time and each pushed the boundary according to their own capability. For them it is not only about conquering the mountain – it is about achieving a goal together. The main message was to showcase the importance of keeping your body in good condition in a realistic achievable way through exercise. During the 21km climb each participant was accompanied by a personal coach (doctor or paramedic) also 50 family members travelled along stressing the importance of taking part in sport together.

The legendary Mont Ventoux symbolizes the mountain of difficulties that transplant patients, their families and donor families go through. The transplant patients can express their gratitude to their donor and donor families by keeping their organ in outstanding physical condition and by proving that no mountain is too high for them.

Physical activity

After transplantation the physical fitness recovers but doesn't reach the level expected in the healthy population. The immunosuppressive medication is a contributing factor to diminished physical fitness as well as the lack of stimulation to exercise. There is also the co-morbidity of the previous disease.

With the support of an intensive

training program over six months in order to successfully climb Mont Ventoux, spectacular results can be achieved: “a VO2max-jump, an improved BMI, countered hypertension...”. However, it is never the intention to change participating transplanted patients into elite athletes. The participants are the ambassadors who represent what can be achieved.

In addition, the ambassadors are role models to transplanted adolescents who don't always take their immunosuppressive medication punctually. Through sport and physical activity, and accompanied by adult (transplanted) companions, they can get motivated again.

Bakala Academy

The preparation takes months and each participant is coached individually by members of the Bakala Academy, a state of the art athletic performance centre supervised by Prof Peter Hespel. The long-term effects of the short stimulus of Transplantoux on daily physical fitness and activity are currently being investigated and preliminary results are promising. This includes participants being screened regularly and recorded with a physical activity monitor for one year after their participation in Transplantoux.

Revelation

Convincing transplanted patients to participate is not necessary, on the contrary people are currently being refused. The earliest patients can subscribe to participate is a year after their transplant. They are required to be medically screened beforehand in an intensive physical training program.

During the climb, every recipient is accompanied by a doctor or paramedic as well as medical companions involved in care programs for organ transplantation. For them, with their knowledge of the patients' feelings during organ failure, seeing the transformation is truly inspirational.

Organ recipients are living with a continual feeling of gratitude. They live thanks to extra time. I still remember as if it was yesterday, the first man we coached to the top of the Ventoux. Almost at the top, next to the Tom Simpson Memorial, he stopped and said “I shouldn't have been here anymore” and fell crying in my arms.

Diethard Monbaliu MD PhD

www.transplantoux.be

www.bakala-academy.com

