



Back from the brink - due to you

Tyneside expertise saves tot's life

» RUTH LAWSON

STRICKEN George Hall's future was bleak – until the skills of surgeons in Newcastle gave him the gift of life.

Parents Hollie Pearson and Jake Hall thought one year-old George's congenital heart defect was terminal.

But his grateful family have spoken of the "impeccable" care and treatment provided by staff at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital, whose future is being decided in a legal challenge, who performed the life-saving op on his first birthday.

George's grandmother Nicola Garbutt said: "The care at the Freeman has been impeccable. We're so very grateful to them for everything they have done."

"I know the children's heart unit is still not fully safe but the politics of everything needs to be kept aside from this. At the end of the day you need to focus on what's best for the children and that's what the Freeman do."

"It's the little things they do not just for the children but for the family too."

Hollie, 19, and Jake, who also have three-year-old son Harvey, were in and out of hospital with George since his birth.

Much of his initial care was

provided by Leeds General Infirmary where medics carried out heart surgery when he was just six-weeks. Doctors there also delivered the devastating news only life-prolonging treatments could be carried out.

Nicola added: "We were told George could never be fixed and he would go down the palliative care route, this meaning they could prolong life. That's a horrible thing to be informed of."

George's health deteriorated towards the end of last year.

And Hollie and Jake were told by doctors an operation called the Glenn Shunt could be carried out but again this would not be curative.

But a number of delays saw George's family seek alternative options and they decided they wanted to be referred to the Freeman.

Once they managed to get the referral agreed, George was rushed to Newcastle where he underwent tests and his family were given the news they never thought they would hear.

"The doctor said he has a very rare condition called ventricular inversion and that he could fix George's poorly heart," said Nicola.

George and his family will have to remain in Newcastle so

he can be monitored following the op last month but Nicola said he is already showing signs of recovery.

"He's still not very well but he is sitting up and playing and is doing great," said Nicola.

A spokesman for Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust said it didn't think the treatment in Newcastle is any different than the treatment it provides.

He said: "From our point of view, we stand by the actions of the cardiologist and the treatment recommended."

"Making a diagnosis is an ongoing process. A diagnosis could evolve after doing a test that could see a change in condition."

"We do acknowledge there is this national issue regarding the future of children's heart surgeries in England, but our surgeons have always made referrals and there has been no change in the number of referrals while this has been going on."

But George's family see it differently and in a show of appreciation for the care and support provided by the Freeman, Nicola planning to raise awareness and money for the hospital.

She hopes others will get behind the heart unit.



THANK YOU Hollie Pearson at the cardiothoracic centre at Newcastle's Freeman hospital with her older son Harvey. Top, youngest son George is responding well to life-saving surgery at the Freeman Hospital

Why Newcastle heart unit has the edge over Leeds

THE risks of moving heart transplants away from Newcastle gave its hospital the edge over Leeds, the High Court has been told.

The claim was made on the second day of the legal challenge to the decision to close Leeds children's heart surgery unit, brought by the Leeds Save Our Surgery campaign.

The court in London heard that NHS body the Joint Committee of

Primary Care Trusts (JCPCT), which made the decision, chose option B for a new national set-up of hospitals running the service – which included Newcastle over Leeds.

Dinah Rose QC, for the JCPCT, said: "The key edge that option B has is because of the risk associated with transferring the transplant service."

Earlier this week the court was told by Philip Havers, representing Save

Our Surgery, that the JCPCT was "assessing in the dark" because it did not have the detailed scores from an assessment of all heart surgery centres carried out by a panel of experts.

But yesterday-Sir Ian Kennedy, who led the panel, said each hospital was judged consistently on the evidence submitted. A final day of evidence is expected next week. An immediate judgement is unlikely.

QC with a bent for medical cases

THE High Court QC leading the Judicial Review into the children's heart unit decision is an expert in medical cases.

Mrs Justice Nicola Davies is renowned for her knowledge and speciality in this field. She has covered many high-profile cases, including defending mass murderer

Harold Shipman and acting for the Department of Health in the BSE inquiry.

The QC graduated from Birmingham University and worked at a small solicitor's firm before changing career to become an investment analyst in the City.

However, she soon returned to the legal profes-

sion. Mrs Justice Nicola Davies was increasingly attracted to the role of a judge and with experience she had gained as a Recorder and Deputy, she applied for appointment to the High Court bench.

On January 22, 2010, she was appointed as a Justice of the High Court in the Queen's Bench Division.