September 26, 2012 - Podgorica, Montenegro

First Transplantation in Montenegro under Croatian RHDC Leadership - Historical Event for Advancing Transplantation in the Balkan Region through the Framework of the South Eastern Europe Health Network

Croatian Minister of Health Rajko Ostojic and a team of 10 Croatian Transplant doctors and delegates arrived in Podgorica, Montenegro on September 24, 2012 to assist Montenegrin doctors in conducting the first ever organ transplantation in the country. The procedure which took place on September 25th was the first living related kidney transplantation in Montenegro, with a 43 year old mother donating a kidney to her 25 year old son. The transplantation was successful, and both mother and son are recovering well. The second living related kidney transplantation took place the next day, immediately following the first as Croatian doctors were on site to assist their Montenegrin colleagues for a mother to donate a kidney to her young daughter. The operations were performed at the University Hospital Montenegro under the supervision of Professor Marina Ratkovic, nephrologist, who has been spearheading transplantation efforts in the country and leading the newly established Montenegrin kidney transplant team.

Minister Ostojic and the Croatian team of doctors and delegates were graciously welcomed by Montenegrin Minister of Health Miodrag Radunovic and country experts. A press conference was held detailing the historical occasion and a reaffirmation by both countries to continue collaborative work in advancing the newly established Montenegrin transplant program and focusing on deceased donation as a future priority.

These landmark events are the direct result of the Regional Health Development Center (RHDC) Croatia led by RHDC Croatia Director Dr. Mirela Busic under the framework of the South Eastern Europe Health Network (SEEHN) in partnership with the World Health Organization. The Transplantation Society (TTS), The European Society for Organ Transplantation (ESOT) and its chapter the European Transplant Coordinators Organisation (ETCO-EDC), the International Society for Organ Donation and Procurement (ISODP), and the European Commission have served as expert advisors to the RHDC Croatia and region to lend expertise and support for the SEEHN Initiative on Deceased Donation. Since the inception of the RHDC Croatia in February 2011, several educational workshops and meetings have been organized to provide professional expertise and technical assistance to SEEHN countries. The ongoing exchange of experience between Montenegro, Croatia, and international experts as facilitated by the RHDC Croatia enabled this historical event only a year and half after collaborative efforts began. Prior to this, patients had been sent to Moscow and Pakistan for transplantations.

In May of 2012, Prof. Francis Delmonico of the Transplantation Society, Dr. Busic, and RHDC Croatia Project Manager Lydia Raley conducted an onsite visit to Montenegro to meet with Ministry representatives and transplant professionals, offering support and expert guidance for launching a national transplant program in Montenegro. Shortly thereafter in June of 2012, the First Ministerial Conference on Organ Donation and Transplantation was held in Zagreb. Minister of Health Ostojic invited Ministers of Health from ten SEEHN countries to partake in
addressing the current status transplantation in South Eastern Europe, encouraging collaboration and emphasizing Croatia's continued support for advancing sustainable regional transplant and donation activities.

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