

## The First Heart Transplant in Man

On Sunday afternoon, December 3, 1967, I was awakened from a nap by a telephone call from Morton Mintz of the Washington Post. "Reuters says that a doctor in South Africa has successfully transplanted a human heart," said Mintz. "What do you say about that?" The Post article on December 4 indicates that the Director of the National Heart Institute called it a "technical tour de force". Reactions recorded from others were more enthusiastic.

That morning I spoke to Theodore Cooper, whom I had recruited to the Institute as Associate Director to run the Artificial Heart-Myocardial Infarction Program, about the possibility of a sudden rise in demand for NHI research funds. We proposed a meeting of potential heart transplanters. By good fortune, we learned that CBS intended to fly the South African surgeon, Christiaan Barnard and his wife to the U.S. I remember that shortly after their arrival on Christmas Eve, Cooper and I were sequestered with them at the Washington home of television commentator Martin Agronsky, who was protecting his scoop.

The meeting in Chicago began in the early afternoon of December 28. Numerous pictures of the event were made by Dr. Rollo Hanlon, a heart surgeon. A composite shows Christiaan Barnard almost backed up to the door, pressed for answers posed by several of his colleagues in the U.S. Their tone was that of teachers who were piqued that a pupil had dared to do "their" experiment first. Questions came quickly from the late David Hume, who had worked on the immunology of transplant rejection, and from Norman Shumway and C. Walton Lillehi, who had perfected the operative technique at the Mayo Clinic, where Barnard had been a trainee. I remember the little beads of sweat on Barnard's lip as he bravely held his stand.

It was a dramatic moment in cardiovascular surgery, the room contain a very large share of the American talent who would now begin such a heroic procedure. Afterward, Cooper and I estimated there might be up to a hundred in the next year. That was about right.

Christiaan Barnard returned to America in March, 1968 to a hero's welcome at the Convocation of the American College of Cardiology in March, 1968. As luck would have it, I gave the Convocation Lecture. I politely praised Dr. Barnard's feat, but clung to my theme that preventive maintenance was more valuable than replacement of the plumbing.