

“I’ve been told how much of a miracle it is that I am alive.”

## Surviving the odds

Brett Goodban is alive today thanks to the efforts of doctors around the world to get father of three home to Australia for life-saving medical treatment.



Brett contracted an aggressive strain of flu which attacked his heart while holidaying in Japan at Christmas 2014.

Days into what was meant to be a trip of a lifetime with his Japanese-born wife, Ami, their three young sons Senna, 6, Luca, 3, and baby Kimi, and his sister Tania and her family, the Cairns dad was admitted to Chiba Hospital after feeling unwell.

He had contracted a severe case of viral pneumonia, triggered by an aggressive strain of influenza which attacked his heart. He developed a blood clot that travelled to his lungs and blocked an artery, causing a cardiac arrest.

Japanese doctors resuscitated the 41-year old and connected him to a ventilator, to help him breathe. They also hooked him up to extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), a heart-lung bypass machine that re-oxygenates the blood and pumps it back into the body.

As Brett's life hung in the balance, his family realised they had to get him back to Australia for the best chance of survival.

As Queensland's leading ECMO centre and only heart transplant service, The Prince Charles Hospital was well positioned to receive Brett for ongoing medical support, but needed to determine whether Brett was well enough to be repatriated over such a long distance.

TPCH's Intensive Care Unit Director, Dr Marc Ziegenfuss spoke with Brett's sister, Tania Lyon, as she sat at her brother's bedside while he lay in a coma. He needed evidence that would affirm his decision to bring Brett home.

Brett's acknowledgement of his sister's voice as she spoke to him, with small tears trickling from his eyes, was the sign Dr Ziegenfuss was looking for.

This set in motion a massive logistical operation with collaboration between doctors from The Prince Charles Hospital, Chiba Hospital in Japan, Queensland's air ambulance service, Careflight, the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, which runs one of Australia's leading ECMO retrieval services, and Brett's travel insurance company.

The mission to transfer Brett from Tokyo to Brisbane proved more difficult than usual. He was dependent on the ECMO machine to provide oxygen to his body and support his blood pressure. The bulky ECMO machine required continuous reliable power and oxygen, and, Brett was receiving additional complex life support.

While Brett's situation was tenuous, a Challenger 604 jet acquired by Careflight only weeks before was a sturdy and timely addition to its fleet and central to the success of the repatriation. It could house the medical team of three doctors, a nurse, three pilots and over 100 kilograms of medical equipment that would enable Brett to survive the nine hour flight covering 7,000 kilometres. According to Careflight, Brett's return to Queensland may be the longest ever civilian transport of a patient on ECMO.

Brett arrived at TPCH at 2am on January 13 with two specialists from the hospital as his receiving team, as well as a team of nurses and perfusion specialists. The team at the Alfred had expertly managed Brett's condition through the transfer with essentially no ill side effects.

Brett was reassessed by intensive care and heart failure specialists at TPCH to plan the next round of treatment. This involved an operation to remove a blood clot in his lungs and another procedure to change over his mechanical cardiac support to take pressure off his heart. In the following weeks, Brett's condition improved with support from a full multidisciplinary team of hospital staff.

His once ailing heart had recovered to near normal and he was successfully removed from the device that had ultimately sustained his life.

Brett has no memory of the events that occurred from his admission to Chiba Hospital to when he woke six weeks later in TPCH's Intensive Care Unit.

"I had no idea what was going on. It was surreal," he said.

On March 24 this year, three months after he was admitted to Chiba Hospital, Brett was released from hospital and returned to his home in Cairns. His doctors say it will take around a year for Brett to fully recover.

"I've been told how much of a miracle it is that I am alive," Brett said.

While Brett didn't get the chance to meet many of his lifesavers, he has absolute gratitude for all the people, locally, nationally and internationally who made his survival possible.

"It's hard to put into words how grateful I am," he said.

"These amazing people have given me the greatest gift of all. I'm alive to watch my beautiful boys grow up and spend the rest of my life with Ami. It doesn't get better than that."

*Opposite: 'Miracle man' Brett Goodban with his wife Ami and children, Luca, 3, Senna, 6, and Kimi, 1. Brett's alive today thanks to the efforts of doctors around the world to get him home to Australia for life-saving medical treatment. Photo courtesy The Courier-Mail.*