

REPORT 3 CONCERNING ERGIN SALIHI

By Paul Polansky - dispatched on 25th April 2009

Yesterday (25 April) Tina and I left Nish at 6 am and drove to Kraguevac to meet with Ergin's doctor (appointment at 9 am). Although we were on time, we had to wait about half an hour for her to make her rounds, seeing the sick children in the paediatric building.

Dr. Mirjana Pavicevic is a specialist in Nephritic syndrome and from the very beginning of our interview, she was adamant that no one really knew what causes this chronic kidney disease. She said she would win a Nobel Prize if she could discover the cause. She thought that malnutrition played a role and that lead poisoning was a possibility. But for her the main observation that she had was that many of her patients were Gypsy children. However, she was sure it was not genetic.



My main concern was how long Ergin would have to be treated. She had no idea. She said it probably would be for years. She said she started to treat a Romani girl (a refugee from Kosovo) when the girl was 16 months old; she was now eight years old and was still getting treatment. Dr. Pavicevic knew of some cases where treatment lasted for 15 years.

Dr. Pavicevic said that Ergin would need to be in hospital for at least another two months. At the moment they were giving him 40 milligrams of medicine a week. Every week they would reduce this by 5 milligrams. However, she felt the hospital in north Mitrovica could also treat him, so she hoped to send him back there next Thursday or Friday.

I asked how he would be transported. She said she would send a telegram to the hospital in north Mitrovica, and then they would send an ambulance for him. However, he could not be treated at home. He would have to stay in the hospital.

Dr. Pavicevic was unaware (although the other doctor seemed to know) that Ergin's family's only food in the Osterode camp came from what they found in the local garbage containers. She also wasn't aware that Ergin had been conceived and had lived his entire life on highly toxic wasteland; the tailing stands of the Trepca mines.

I asked if it were possible for Ergin to have a kidney biopsy to determine the cause of his illness. She said their medical procedure was only to do a biopsy if the illness returned several times. Even then, she wasn't sure if a biopsy would show the actual cause of Nephritic syndrome. The little Gypsy girl Dr. Pavicevic had been treating since the girl was sixteen months old had a biopsy at the age of six years but that biopsy did not reveal the cause of her chronic kidney disease.

Dr. Pavicevic said that Ergin was now eating well and had in fact gained two kilos. When he arrived at her hospital he weighed 24 kilos but four kilos was water from the swelling. After that was drained, he weighed only 20 kilos. Now his face was filling out and he was getting some good food, specially prepared for him in the hospital kitchen: boiled meats, boiled chicken (without skin), potatoes, rice and yoghurt. She asked us to buy him more fruit, juices and hard candy (no chocolates). He wasn't allowed to eat anything with salt; also no fats, no egg yolks, no pork.

I saw on Dr. Pavicevic's desk several glossy magazines in English from the United States. They were monthly journals from the International Paediatric Nephrology Association of Springer, NY. I asked if she could read or speak English. She said no, but she had someone to translate the most important articles for her.

We then went to visit Ergin. He was standing up by his bed watching through his glass window/partition a small boy in the next room playing with some toys. The small boy's mother was with him. In fact, all the children in the ward had their mothers staying with them. Ergin is the only one whose mother is not there. Of course, she has six or seven other children to look

after and despite giving her 70 Euros to make the trip to see him, she felt it would be too upsetting to see him for only a few hours and then leave again.

After Dr. Pavicevic took Ergin's blood pressure (see photo) Tina called his mother so that Ergin could talk to her. Despite leaving him with telephone credit on our last visit he had not been able to get his phone to work, so he had not spoken to his family since we left.



We got Ergin on the phone so his mother could hear him. But she couldn't stop crying and Ergin couldn't either. Ergin finally wanted to talk to his father but he wasn't there. Tina told them that he was in much better health, that he was eating well, and that he would probably come back to the hospital in north Mitrovica next Thursday or Friday. It was a very traumatic telephone call to say the least.

I gave Ergin my spare mobile telephone. We put his sim card in it and Tina showed him how it worked so he could call his mother from time to time. We also gave him a charger for the phone.

Before leaving to buy the groceries that Dr. Pavicevic had asked us to get for Ergin, we gave him some of the chicken that Tina had cooked the day before for him. He took one whole leg and thigh and part of the breast and devoured it

like a hungry wolf.

Walking across the hospital lawn to some shops outside the hospital gates we looked back and saw Ergin looking out the window, following us. He never left that window until we returned. He couldn't keep his eyes off of us.

Before leaving, we made sure Ergin knew how to use my mobile and that he had his mother's telephone number (actually their neighbour's since his family doesn't have their own phone).

We left a very sad boy, but encouraged that he looks much better and is obviously getting good care. All the nurses and doctors seem to be interested in him, in trying to keep him happy.

On the way back to Nish we had mechanical problems with my old car and barely made it. More repairs are needed. I don't know when we will get it back on the road so don't know if we can make another trip to the hospital before Ergin is taken back to north Mitrovica. But now that his telephone is working, Tina plans to call him every day to talk to him and cheer him up.

That's the latest.

Paul

