

August 25, 2021
Gothenburg, Sweden

Frontline Colombian team fights COVID-19 with ECMO therapy

Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO) – providing the body with oxygen when the lungs fail to perform this task – is one of the key pillars in the treatment of severely ill COVID-19 patients. Combined with the professional expertise of the Colombian thoracic surgeon Diego Pardo, it has been an important tool in his efforts to save lives across the region.

As president of the Colombian Association of Thoracic Surgery, Dr. Pardo, also a licensed physician, is one of the country's leading authorities in the area and a pioneer in using ECMO therapy, which is used to keep critically ill patients alive while giving their damaged lungs time to recover.

Dr. Pardo manages Protorax, a reference center in the northern part of Colombia for ECMO, lung transplantation and cancer treatment using minimally invasive surgery.

His partnership with Getinge started in 2014, when Dr. Pardo and his partner Luis Fernando Rueda began exploring the potential of ECMO. They were looking for equipment that was effective as well as easy and safe to use, with a platform that offers strategic information to physicians.

“We wanted a reliable device that is easy to move around. This is crucial for enabling our team to travel to critically ill patients in places where there is no access to care resources,” says Dr. Pardo.

Getinge's Cardiohelp, the small and lightweight portable heart-lung support system, met all the requirements – and the ECMO Transportation Program was created.

“Colombia is a fairly large country with few medical resources outside the major cities. Working with a network of air ambulances allowed us to fly to critically ill patients in different parts of the country, starting care with ECMO on site to stabilize them, and then bring them to our hospital,” explains Dr. Pardo.

The COVID-19 outbreak in Colombia in March 2020 brought new challenges to the Protorax team, but it also deepened the opportunity to utilize expertise developed and perfected over six years.

“We had to optimize resources to bring the ECMO therapy to more patients, which proved to be fundamental in reducing deaths. What used to be done once or twice per month is now done three or four times a week. We use the same number of cannulas and oxygenation kits in a month that we used to spend in a year,” explains Dr. Pardo.

For the surgeons, the exceptional challenges when dealing with COVID-19 has also brought findings that will help saving lives in the future.

“The pandemic has showed us that technology affects the outcome and that having access to it is necessary to reduce deaths. The second finding is that we have been able to prove the efficiency of ECMO in critical care. When available here and now, patients really benefit from it,” says Dr. Pardo.

The story of Dr. Pardo and his team is told in the documentary ‘Héroes de Blanco’, produced between October 2020 and March 2021.

[Watch the documentary on YouTube >>](#)

About Cardiohelp

The Cardiohelp System is a small and lightweight heart-lung support system for critically ill patients that suffer from severe respiratory diseases or heart failure. Although extracorporeal life support provided by the Cardiohelp System is not a therapy itself, it acts as a bridge for recovery or transplantation. This gives caregivers more time to optimize the patient’s therapy while easing the body’s workload.

[Read more about Getinge’s ECMO solutions >>](#)

This information is intended for an audience outside of the US. For questions about market availability, reach out to your local Getinge sales representative.

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About Getinge

With a firm belief that every person and community should have access to the best possible care, Getinge provides hospitals and life science institutions with products and solutions aiming to improve clinical results and optimize workflows. The offering includes products and solutions for intensive care, cardiovascular procedures, operating rooms, sterile reprocessing and life science. Getinge employs over 10,000 people worldwide and the products are sold in more than 135 countries.