

# INTO the HEARTLAND CAMPAIGN

**SITE: KALININGRAD  
DISTRICT: NORTHWESTERN  
COLLABORATION LAUNCHED: 2013**

**APRIL 7-15, 2017  
SURGICAL-EDUCATIONAL  
MISSION 5**



## Veronika's story: a lifelong search for surgical treatment

Veronika is a shy, intelligent 10-year-old girl. She and her mother Anna traveled from Taganrog, a port city in the Southern Federal District of Russia. Veronika lives with her mother, father, and grandparents. Her mother works as a customs inspector, and her father works in information technology at a bank. In school, Veronika's favorite subject is math; in her free time she enjoys drawing. Inspired by her father, she dreams of growing up and working with computers.

Veronika was diagnosed with a congenital heart defect in utero. She was born in Rostov-on-Don in February 2007. Shortly after birth, the doctors there diagnosed her with Ebstein anomaly. Soon thereafter, she was diagnosed with Wolff-Parkinson-White syndrome, a type of arrhythmia that sometimes accompanies an Ebstein diagnosis. Veronika was prescribed medication to relieve her heart rhythm issues, but local pediatricians were unsure if surgery was possible for her. The family received conflicting medical advice, and some surgeons would not consider valve repair.

While she was still an infant, Veronika began to experience instances of tachycardia (dangerously rapid heart rate). The medication she was prescribed was not working. Veronika spent months at various hospitals as doctors tried to figure out which treatments might improve her condition. She had to undergo multiple cardiac ablations before her symptoms were under control. (A cardiac ablation is a minimally-invasive procedure used to intentionally scar small targeted areas of heart tissue that contribute to arrhythmias. Once the tissue is scarred, it can no longer conduct unwanted abnormal electrical signals within the heart.) Veronika traveled with her family to various centers throughout Russia: Samara, Tomsk, and Moscow. In 2008, Veronika had multiple open heart operations, including a Glenn procedure and tricuspid valve annuloplasty.

For more than six months prior to Heart to Heart's arrival, Veronika was very sick. She complained of dizziness even while sitting in class. Exercising was completely out of the question; she could barely walk up a flight of stairs. Anxious about her daughter's condition, Veronika's mother wrote to Heart to Heart asking if we could do anything to help. Fortunately, our Ebstein symposium was scheduled for 2017. Veronika arrived in Kaliningrad at the beginning of April for her promised evaluation. She was deemed a suitable candidate for open heart surgery to repair her valve. On Thursday, April 13, surgeons Joseph Dearani (Mayo Clinic) and Vyacheslav Belov (Kaliningrad Federal Center) successfully performed the Cone reconstruction on Veronika's tricuspid valve.

She was discharged from the PCICU the day after her operation. Her prognosis is good; Veronika has a normal life expectancy. However, like any child with a severe congenital heart defect, Veronika will undergo annual evaluations by a cardiologist.

As with many of our patients, Veronika had a special impact on our team. We are thrilled that she was able to receive the life-saving surgery she desperately needed and wish her the very best in making her dream of working with computers a reality.

### PATIENT PROFILE

Child	Veronika Z.
Age	10 years old
DOB	February 27, 2007
Weight	Current: 68 lbs
Home	Taganrog
Diagnosis	Ebstein, s/p tricuspid valve annuloplasty, Glenn (2008)
Open heart surgery	Cone repair April 13, 2017
Discharged from PCICU	April 14, 2017
Discharged from hospital	April 24, 2017

*Based on an interview conducted by Hannah Hunter, Heart to Heart staff, with the aid of an interpreter.*