

Vienna, 5 October 2017

## **Each year, one in every thousand Austrians undergoes cardiac surgery**

**It is one of the year's most dramatic stories: 2017 Eurovision Song Contest winner Salvador Sobral is in an intensive care unit, desperately awaiting a donor heart – his life hanging in the balance. Life-saving heart operations such as transplants and valve surgery are the focus of attention in Vienna this week at a major European medical conference at the Austria Center Vienna.**

“With a heart transplant, we have a maximum of four hours between cutting off the blood supply to the heart in the donor and the point at which it has to start beating again in the recipient – a very narrow window,” explained Prof. Michael Grimm, President of the Austrian Society for Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery. “While the team responsible for extracting the organ is still on their way to us, the recipient is already being prepared for the operation, and the damaged heart is removed so that the transplant can begin the moment the donor heart arrives.” Heart transplants are not only challenging from a technical point of view, but also involve an enormous logistical undertaking. Around 70 heart transplants are conducted in Austria each year. On average, patients in Europe spend around four months on the waiting list after being cleared for transplant. The five-year survival rate is already at 70-80%.

### **Minimally invasive valve surgery: small incision, major effect**

Newer minimally-invasive heart valve surgery options are another of the focuses of this year's European Association for Cardio-Thoracic Surgery (EACTS) Annual Meeting from 7-11 October. Surgery is primarily required in older patients, when valves begin to wear out, leak or become congested. Patients often become aware that their heart valves are not working as they should when they notice a general physical decline and shortness of breath. During minimally invasive heart valve surgery, the new valve is inserted through a small incision in the abdomen, rather than by opening up the chest cavity as in the past. Under this procedure, the area being operated on is no longer directly visible to the heart surgeon with the naked eye. Instead, the site is captured on camera using an endoscope, and displayed on monitors. “These new, minimally invasive valve surgery methods enable us to operate with even greater precision, and the advantages for patients are plain to see: the body is exposed to less stress, there is a lower risk of complication, less pain, quicker recovery, and patients can return to their normal lives outside hospital faster,” Grimm emphasised. In

Austria alone between 1,800 and 2,400 people require life saving heart valve surgery each year.

### **Austria offers heart operations for all**

Each year around 7,000 patients require heart operations in Austria – the equivalent of one in every thousand Austrians, from a purely statistical perspective. Around 30-40% of these procedures are accounted for by heart bypasses and valve surgery. Other cases include combined operations, procedures to correct congenital defects and heart transplants. “We can be particularly proud of the fact that we are able to offer high-end surgical treatments of this nature under social insurance coverage, which makes them available to all Austrians. This can by no means taken for granted in other countries, and presumably it is one of the reasons why we are out in front when it comes to clinical heart surgery on the international stage,” Grimm explained. And so that things stay that way, training and educating younger colleagues is a subject that is very close to his heart.

### **About IAKW-AG**

Internationales Amtssitz- und Konferenzzentrum Wien, Aktiengesellschaft (IAKW-AG) is responsible for maintaining the Vienna International Centre (VIC) and operating the Austria Center Vienna (ACV). The Austria Center Vienna is Austria’s largest conference centre, with 24 halls, 180 meeting rooms, and some 22,000m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space, and is one of the top players on the international conference circuit. IAKW-AG and the Austria Center Vienna are headed by Chief Executive Officer Susanne Baumann-Söllner. Visit [www.acv.at](http://www.acv.at) for additional information.

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