

Calif. woman to show off newly transplanted hand

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This March 5, 2011 image provided by UCLA Health System shows Dr. Kodi Azari, left, and members of his surgical team performing a hand transplant at Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles. The transplant was performed on a 26-year-old mother from Northern California who lost her right hand in a traffic accident nearly five years ago. UCLA is only the fourth center in the nation to offer this procedure and the 13th hand transplant surgery performed in the United States (AP Photo/UCLA Health System, Ann Johansson)

(AP) -- A 26-year-old mother who lost her right hand in a traffic accident several years ago is reuniting with her doctors to show off her new donated hand.

The Northern California woman received the donor limb in a marathon surgery last month at the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center in Los

Angeles.

Doctors who will introduce the woman at a news conference Tuesday said she was living with a prosthetic and wanted a hand transplant to better care for her daughter.

During the 14 1/2-hour operation, a team of nearly 20 surgeons, nurses and support staff grafted a hand from a deceased donor onto the patient and intricately connected bones, [blood vessels](#), nerves and tendons.

The transplant was the 13th such case in the United States and the first for the hospital.

The patient was able to move her fingers soon after the surgery. She faces several months of rehabilitation and has to take drugs for the rest of her life to prevent rejection.

Hand transplantation has come a long way since the first one was carried out in Ecuador in 1964 before the development of modern immunosuppressive therapy. The transplant failed after two weeks and the patient had to have the new hand amputated.

More than three decades later, French doctors in 1998 performed a hand transplant that lasted two years. The recipient did not take medications as ordered and his body rejected the limb.

Since then, more than 40 hand transplants have been performed around the world including several double hand transplants. The recipient of the first U.S. hand transplant in 1999 has lived with a donor hand for a little over a decade.

"It's clear that it's achievable," said Dr. Warren Breidenbach, who performed the historic surgery.

The UCLA operation cost about \$800,000, but since it was experimental, the patient did not have to pay.

Little has been revealed about the donor except that the hand matched the patient's in terms of blood type, size and color.

A week after the UCLA operation, doctors at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta performed the 14th hand transplant in the country.

The recipient was 21-year-old Linda Lu, who had her left hand amputated as a baby due to complications from a rare disease.

Lu's lead surgeon, Dr. Linda Cendales, said many who undergo a [hand transplant](#) tend to feel more sensation than if they wore a prosthetic, and they are able to open doors, tie their shoes or turn the pages of a newspaper.

"They will never have a normal hand," Cendales said. "But they do recover enough sensation to differentiate between temperatures, and rough and smooth surfaces."

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