

First double-leg transplant patient has limbs amputated (Update)

June 11 2013, by Anna Cuenca

The world's first double-leg transplant patient has had both limbs amputated after an unrelated illness forced him to stop taking anti-rejection drugs, the Spanish hospital that carried out the operation said Tuesday.

"The patient who had two legs transplanted at the Hospital La Fe in 2011 had to undergo an operation to amputate the two extremities," said a statement issued by the hospital in Valencia, eastern Spain.

The patient, who contracted an unrelated illness, had the two limbs amputated about a year and a half after the milestone transplant, it said.

He had to stop taking immunosuppressant drugs required to prevent his body rejecting the transplant because the medicine was complicating the treatment of the illness, the hospital said.

"In these cases the protocol is that, if the transplanted organ is not a vital organ, it should be removed from the patient so as to allow treatment of the illness that is more serious and urgent."

The patient had not given permission for the release of information about his current treatment, the hospital added.

Renowned surgeon Pedro Cavadas led the team that carried out the original 10-hour transplant operation, which was completed on July 10, 2011.

The double leg surgery was touted as a world first.

More than 50 personnel were involved including surgeons, nurses, anaesthetists and transplant coordinators.

Surgeons had to connect nerves, blood vessels, muscles, tendons and bone structure.

But the patient, a man in his 20s who has not been identified, was obliged to take immunosuppressant drugs for the rest of his life.

In an interview with the newspaper 20 minutos around eight months after the transplant, Cavadas said the patient was moving his legs in the swimming pool and the recovery was going "very well".

The man had had both legs amputated above the knee after a traffic accident.

The height of the amputation prevented him from using a prosthesis, meaning that he would have been consigned to a wheelchair with "zero" chance of walking again, the transplant surgeon said at the time.

In October 2008, Cavadas carried out the first double arm transplant in Spain and the second in the world.

In August 2009 he performed Spain's first face transplant on a patient who has since died of a pre-existing and unrelated illness. The Hospital La Fe gave no details and asked media to respect the privacy of relatives of the donor and recipient.

Spain has become a world leader in organ donation since it set up a network of transplant coordinators in 1989 at all hospitals to closely monitor emergency wards and identify potential donors.

"The Spanish transplant programme is a model because of the altruism and solidarity shown by donors," the Hospital La Fe said.

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