Colombian with COVID-19 gives birth in coma

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Diana Angola was fighting for her own life when she gave birth to son Jefferson. The 36-year-old had been put into a coma having contracted the novel coronavirus, which left her lungs barely able cope.

Doctors performed a caesarian section due to the state of her lungs and Jefferson was born at least 14 weeks prematurely.

The case generated "a lot of shock," Paula Velasquez, a doctor specializing in internal medicine at the Versalles clinic in the southeastern city of Cali, told AFP.

"We knew that there were few reported cases of survival in a context as severe as our patient," said Velasquez.

Angola, who also has a daughter, was taken to hospital on May 15 with a terrible fever.

Three days later she was put into an induced coma and kept that way until surgery.

Because of her pregnancy, she was kept sitting up at a 45 degree angle, when those suffering from pneumonia are normally laid down flat to help their breathing.

Jefferson, though premature, was born without the coronavirus—but doctors said he struggled to breathe, and that they had to revive him.

"We had to go through the whole procedure of a critical patient," pediatrician Edwin Olivo, who was one of the specialists involved in the birth, said.

But, he added, though the baby remains in an incubator he quickly started putting on weight and breathing more easily.

"A human being can survive from 24 weeks with a good weight, but with a lot of technology and an effect on neurological development and the lungs," said Velasquez.

Painful memories

Now recovered from the virus, Angola is desperate to be discharged with her son.

"It's really emotional knowing that we fought, that the doctors helped us survive," she said, her voice faint.

She says she doesn't know how she contracted the virus and her family insists she complied rigidly with the lockdown, first imposed on March 25 but which has been easing recently.

In the hospital corridors, her sister Angela breathes a sigh of relief.

Hospitals bring back painful memories: two years ago her mother and another sister died in intensive care, where Diana was for several weeks.

Angela remembers her sister screaming: "Don't let them put me on artificial ventilation, get me out of here, I don't want to die," after doctors told her what treatment they were proposing.

With Latin America now the epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic,

Angela wants her sister and nephew's case to act as a lesson for others.

"There are many people who go around without face masks, who go to parties, because they don't know anyone (with the virus) they don't realize" how dangerous it is.

With more than 2,600 deaths and 80,000 cases, Colombia is the sixth most affected country in Latin America in terms of fatalities and fifth worst for infections.

However, the virus is spreading quickly in the country of 50 million, with a quarter of those deaths and cases reported just last week.

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