

Spain's 1st face transplant patient can smile now

August 23 2009, By HAROLD HECKLE , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- Spain's first face transplant patient - the first anywhere to get a new tongue and jaw - has been so pleased by his new appearance that he smiled, hospital officials said Saturday.

The 43-year-old patient, who underwent the surgery Tuesday at La Fe hospital in the eastern city of Valencia, may go home in about a week, said transplant specialist surgeon Pedro Cavadas. The man lost part of his face more than 10 years ago due to radiotherapy to treat an aggressive tumor.

Cavadas said the patient will need to learn to eat and speak intelligibly again after more than a decade of not being able to, but he saw himself in a mirror and was so happy he smiled.

Hospital officials said Saturday that the patient, whose name has not been released, continued to make good progress.

The operation performed by Cavadas and a team of 30 - the eighth [face transplant](#) in the world - took 15 hours to transfer facial parts from a 35 year-old donor who had died in a traffic accident.

Cavadas said he had been forced to bring forward a press conference about the operation because press reports had revealed the identity of the donor.

"The intimacy of the [donor](#) has been violated, something as sacred as

that. This benefits no one," Cavadas said.

There have been four previous face transplant operations in France, two in the United States and one in China.

In October doctor Cavadas operated to transplant two arms onto a 28 year-old Spaniard who had lost both limbs above the elbow.

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Citation: Spain's 1st face transplant patient can smile now (2009, August 23) retrieved 20 September 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-08-spain-1st-transplant-patient.html>

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