

Spanish surgeons claim first double leg transplant

11 July 2011, by Gabriel Rubio

Spanish surgeons Monday performed the world's first double-leg transplant on a man whose legs were amputated above the knee after an accident, officials said.

Surgeons operated through the night on the man, who had faced life in a wheelchair because prosthetic limbs were unsuitable, said the health authority for the eastern region of Valencia.

"It is the first time in the world that such a transplant has been carried out," it said in a statement after the surgery, carried out in the La Fe hospital in the city of Valencia.

Neither donors nor the patient were identified but the health authority promised to give further details later, depending on his condition.

The doctor in charge of the operation, Pedro Cavadas, said he would need at least 48 hours before being able to provide more information.

Spain's health ministry authorised the transplant last November.

Cavadas is known in Spain for having made several groundbreaking organ transplants.

In October 2008, he carried out the first double arm transplant in Spain and the second in the world, and in August 2009 he performed Spain's first face transplant.

Spanish Health Minister Leire Pajin Monday telephoned Cavadas to congratulate him on the "success" of the latest operation, Spanish media reported.

The surgery "brings hope to other patients who have suffered amputations," the minister said.

She also praised the "generosity" of the donor's family who had helped "make our country an

example of solidarity in the world."

The director of the National Transplant Organisation, Rafael Matesanz, confirmed the operation was a world first.

"The indications for this kind of surgery are very rare; it is when the amputation is so high that there is really no space to fit a prosthesis and the patient is condemned to remain in a wheelchair," Matesanz told Spanish public radio.

When a patient is missing one leg or the amputation is below the knee, a prosthesis is the recommended treatment, he said.

The Spanish transplant chief said the search for a donor was "very complicated" because the person had to fulfill a series of requirements including being of the right age and blood type, and not being too far from the operating hospital.

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.

When they learn of a death, they tactfully talk to the grieving families to get permission to use the organs to help save the lives of others.

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