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WORLD

'Full-face' transplant hailed as first

30-member team gives Spanish gunshot victim new nose, cheeks, teeth

DANIEL WOOLLS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MADRID—A hospital in Spain says it has carried out the world's first full-face transplant, giving a man a new nose, skin, jaws, cheekbones, teeth and other features after he lost his face in an accident.

Other transplant experts lauded the surgery, but were unsure it could be called "full-face."

The operation was carried out by a 30-member medical team in late March and took 24 hours to perform, according to the Vall d'Hebron Hospital in Barcelona.

The patient now has a completely new face from his hairline down and one visible scar, which looks like a wrinkle running across his

neck, said Dr. Joan Pere Barret, the surgeon who led the team.

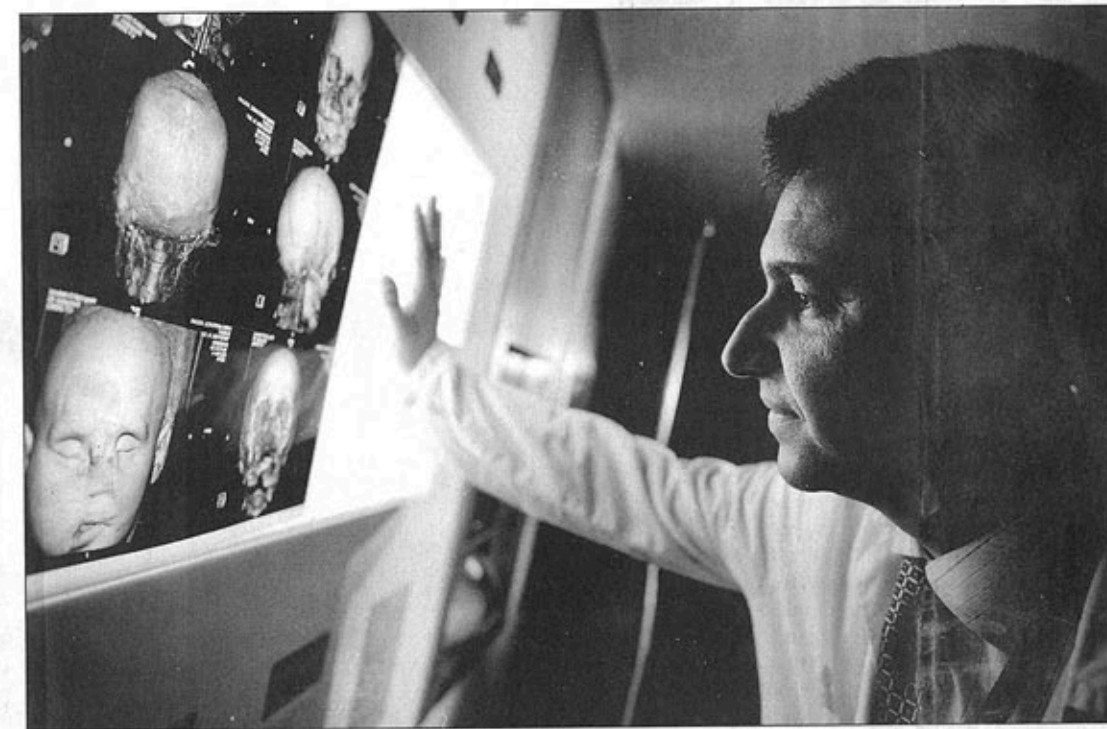
"If you look him in the face, you see a normal person, like anyone else we have as a patient in the hospital," he said Friday.

Barret declined to name the patient, saying only that he was a Spaniard between 20 and 40 years old and was recovering well. The man cannot yet speak, eat or smile, but can see and swallow saliva.

Before the latest surgery, the patient had undergone surgery nine times and could only breathe and be fed through tubes. He also had problems speaking.

In Britain, the U.K. Facial Transplantation Research Team called the Spanish operation "the most complex face transplantation operation there has probably been in the world to date." It stopped short, however, of calling it the world's first full-face transplant.

Barret said the operation involved



DAVID RAMOS/AP

"If you look him in the face, you see a normal person," says Dr. Joan Pere Barret of the man who underwent a full-face transplant in Barcelona. Barret was lead surgeon in a 30-member team that carried out the procedure.

replacing what was left of the man's face with features "in one piece."

"It is a little bit like the movie with John Travolta and Nicolas Cage," he said, referring to the 1997 thriller *Face/Off*, in which Travolta undergoes a medical procedure to acquire the villain Cage's appearance.

Barret said there have been 10 partial-face transplant operations carried out in the world so far but this was the first involving a person's whole face.

The world's first partial-face transplant was done on a woman in France in 2005. The Spanish operation is similar to a near-total face transplant carried out in 2008 in Cleveland on a woman who was shot in the face.

But the Spanish case "seems to us to be more complex," said Neil Hubbard, a spokesman for the British transplant research team, adding the Spanish patient had also been shot in the face.

Dr. Maria Siemionow, who operated on the woman in Cleveland, said the Spanish team had done great work. But a diagram she says she has seen does not make clear that the team replaced the man's whole face, leaving doubts about his eyelids and jaw.

A week after the operation, the patient asked to see himself in the mirror and was satisfied with what he saw, Barret said. He is expected to stay hospitalized for two months.



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Whole race transplants (and re-plants, will become commonplace throughout the medical and cosmetic industries for people who have severely disfigurements.(i.e. faces torn off by machinery etc.).