

First full face transplant patient appears in public in Spain



NEW OUTLOOK: Oscar, the world's first full face transplant patient, appears in public for the first time with his doctor and sister. Picture:

A SPANISH farmer given the world's first full facial transplant appeared in public for the first time today as he was discharged from hospital to start a new life.

Oscar, 31, who did not reveal his full identity, was unable to eat, speak or breathe normally since he was disfigured in a gun accident in 2005.

The operation four months ago has enabled him to eat soft foods, drink liquids and even shave again.

Appearing at a press conference at Barcelona's Vall d'Hebron University Hospital, where he underwent surgery, Oscar spoke with difficulty just two months after regaining his voice.



FACE RECONSTRUCTION: This handout picture released by Barcelona's Vall d'Hebron hospital shows Oscar before and after his face transplant.

What's your opinion? Tell us about it.

His sister, speaking on her brother's behalf, said: "He is looking forward to walking down the street without having people looking at him five times.

"He wants to go back and do the things that he loved like hunting and fishing. We want to have a family meal together."

Oscar has most of the feeling in his new face and he can move his eyebrows, upper eyelids, jaw and part of his cheek muscles - but still cannot close his eyes and does not have feeling in his lips.

Aside from facial swelling and minor complications, his progress was described by doctors as "excellent".

Previous surgical attempts to restore Oscar's appearance left him with nothing but a hole where his face and mouth should have been.

He was inspired by the case of Isabelle Dinoire, the French woman who received the first partial face transplant in 2005 and contacted surgeons.

Dr Joan Pere Barret, who headed the team of surgeons, said: "I felt for him and am incredibly proud. It was a very brave thing to face everyone today because he is a very quiet man who wants to live a normal life."

The 24-hour operation, which took two years to plan, was believed to be the first time an entire face - including the skin, muscles, teeth, lips, cheekbones and jaw - were transplanted and reconstructed, using tissue from a brain-dead donor.

Commenting on claims made this month by French surgeons that they had carried out the first full face transplant, the surgeon said: "Everything is pioneering at the moment. We try to learn from each other."

Although at least 10 facial transplants have been carried out in France, America, China and Spain, until now they have involved just part of the face.