

## Spaniard with face transplant speaks to press



Face transplant patient Oscar, with Dr. Joan Pere Barret yesterday, is expected to need at least another year of therapy. (David Ramos/ Associated Press)

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MADRID — A Spanish man who underwent the world's first full face transplant appeared before TV cameras yesterday for the first time since his surgery, thanking his doctors and the family of the donor.

Identified only as Oscar, the 31-year-old spoke with considerable difficulty at a news conference at Barcelona's Vall d'Hebron hospital, where he was operated on in late March.

During the 24-hour surgery, doctors lifted an entire face, including jaw, nose, cheekbones, muscles, teeth, and eyelids, and placed it masklike onto the man. He has been described as a farmer who was unable to breathe or eat on his own after accidentally shooting himself in the face five years ago.

The head of the surgical team, Dr. Joan Pere Barret, said yesterday that Oscar will need between a year and 18 months of physical therapy and is expected to regain up to 90 percent of his facial functions. He is now being released from the hospital and sent home.

He is able to drink liquids and eat soft foods, and has been able to speak for the past two months, the hospital said in a statement. The patient also has regained feeling in most of his face and is partly recovering movement of his muscles.

One good sign was that a week after the operation, he had to be shaved because of beard growth.

But he also suffered acute rejection twice, once four weeks after the surgery and again between the second and third months.

Both times, the new face was saved with medication, the statement said.

At the news conference, Oscar seemed relaxed as he looked out at reporters with eyes he cannot yet close completely.

A younger woman who was identified as his sister but not named, to protect the family's privacy, said her brother looks forward to leading a normal life. ■