Boston Hospital Performs Double Hand Transplant

Denise Lavoie, AP
A quadruple amputee who received new hands through a transplant operation says he is looking forward to doing ordinary things again: getting dressed, taking a shower, making coffee and, sweetest of all, touching the faces of his two grandsons. Richard Mangino, 65, lost his arms below the elbows and his legs below the knees after he had a kidney stone in 2002 and contracted a severe bloodstream infection. Last week, a team of more than 40 surgeons, nurses and support staff at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital worked for more than 12 hours performing a hand transplant. Mangino said at a news conference Friday that he had adjusted to his life as a quadruple amputee. The former director of the ground crew for United Airlines at Boston's Logan airport, Mangino taught himself to do daily activities with his prostheses, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow and painting. He said people kept telling him what a "miracle" he was.

"But the one miracle I have prayed for, since my oldest grandson Trevor was born, was to be able to feel the sense of touch again ... to touch his and Nicky's little faces, and stroke their hair, and to teach them to throw a ball," he said. "To me, that would be a miracle. And today, my miracle has come true." Doctors said it will take six to nine months for Mangino to regain sensory function in his hands, but days after surgery he began independently moving his fingers.

The donor's name was not made public. In a statement, the wife of the donor said her husband, in talking about donation, always said, "It's just a body." "I didn't have to struggle with the decision," she said of donating her husband's hands. "After I digested what it entailed, I thought, if it can help someone else out — I felt strongly that my husband would feel the same way," she said in her statement.

Dr. Bohdan Pomahac, director of plastic surgery transplantation at Brigham and Women's, said there have been approximately 50 hands transplanted worldwide, about a dozen of them in the United States. He said Mangino's surgery was only the fourth bilateral hand transplant in the U.S. Mangino's procedure was the second bilateral hand transplant by surgeons at Brigham and Women's, which has also performed four face transplants.

Mangino's surgery involved multiple tissues, including skin, tendons, muscles, ligaments, bones and blood vessels on his forearms and hands. He said he is looking forward to being able to do everyday things without having to struggle. "I won't have to perform a miracle anymore to just get up in the morning," he said.

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