Surgeons Separate California Conjoined Twins

Brooke Donald, AP
Twin 2-year-old girls who were joined at the chest and abdomen were separated Tuesday during a lengthy, complex procedure at Stanford University's children's hospital. The operation that gave Philippines-born sisters Angelina and Angelica Sabuco their independence took more than nine hours and a team of more than 40 people.
By mid-afternoon, the girls had moved to their own operating rooms at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital for the second phase of surgery — reconstructing the area where they were connected. Two hours later, they were moved to the intensive care unit, each with a scar stretching from her chest to her belly. "This is a dream come true," their mother, Ginady Sabuco, said through tears to reporters after the surgery was complete. "Words cannot express how the family feels."

Dr. Gary Hartman, the lead surgeon, said the procedure went smoothly. "The long-term prognosis is that we should have a happy, healthy set of girls. We don't see any barrier to a full recovery," Hartman said. Angelina and Angelica moved to the United States from the Philippines with their mother last year. They live in San Jose with their parents and 10-year-old brother.

They had been doing very well considering the obstacles. The girls learned to walk despite their face-to-face orientation and could recite colors and numbers. Hartman said staying connected would have posed long-term health risks, including increased damage to their skeletal and muscular structure. The surgery required separating livers, diaphragms, breastbones, and chest and abdominal wall muscles.

The reconstruction included covering what plastic surgeon Dr. Peter Lorenz described as a "window" left in their chests after separation. Since July, the girls had received weekly injections of sterile saltwater into balloons placed under their skin. The procedure stretched their skin and grew new skin to patch the area. The children were being kept sedated and doctors said they could be awakened as early as Wednesday. They are expected to be in the hospital for at least two weeks.

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