

Much to be thankful for: new heart, new baby

Med center restarts transplant program

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The Journal News

VALHALLA — As if Victorino Discua Maldonado was not fortunate enough to receive a new heart, he is scheduled to leave the

Editor's note

Phil Reisman's column will return on Thursday.

hospital today and go home to another new arrival: his first child.

The heart came during a transplant at Westchester Medical Center. His wife, Rosa Discua, delivered the baby, a boy, over the weekend.

"It's new heart and new baby," Maldonado said as he recuperated in the hospital last week, his wife by his side. "My God, it's beautiful."

Maldonado's transplant operation, which began May 12 and concluded about 4 a.m. the next day, was the first at the medical center since it restarted its heart trans-

plant program in the fall. The program was suspended in June 2004 during the hospital's financial crisis.

The hospital is one of six in New York that perform heart transplants.

Maldonado, a 40-year-old resident of Long Beach, on Long Island, was transferred to Westchester Medical Center on Feb. 23. He had been treated at a Long Island hospital and was so ill that he needed to be in a transplant center.

"The first several hours we weren't sure that he was even go-

ing to make it," said Dr. Warren Rosenblum, the hospital's director of heart failure and heart transplant.

Maldonado, who came to the United States from Honduras 17 years ago, first became sick in 1995. Rosenblum said it was likely that at some point a viral infection had attacked his heart.

Maldonado had a pacemaker inserted. He worked as a deliveryman for a Long Island pharmacy until about eight months ago.

When he came to the medical center, his heart was enlarged and

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weak, and there was a leak in the mitral valve between the top and bottom chambers of the left side of the heart, Rosenblum said.

"That actually made things worse in terms of fluid buildup into his lungs," he said.

He was stabilized with medications and was well enough to wait for a transplant.

The call that a heart was available came in about 3 a.m. May 12. Rosenblum went to tell Maldonado.

"He was stunned," Rosenblum said. "He couldn't talk."

As one member of the transplant team flew to a hospital to get the heart, Maldonado was prepped for surgery.

"You really have about a four-hour window from the time the heart is taken out of the donor to the time the heart is implanted," said Dr. David Spielvogel, the hospital's director of heart transplant. He performed the transplant with Dr. Steven Lansman, the chief of cardiothoracic surgery.

"I hate to say this, but for a heart transplant it really was quite routine," Spielvogel said. "You couldn't ask for a better first transplant for the program."

Five people are on the hospital's waiting list for hearts.

Maldonado, speaking through a translator, praised his doctors and the hospital.

He said he had met his wife through her brothers. She moved here from Honduras two years ago and they married 16 months ago.

Discua, who will be 28 today, had been coming up from Long Island to visit her husband, but as her due date grew closer, she was admitted to the maternity ward so she would not have to travel.

Staff members were rooting for her to deliver before Maldonado was discharged so the couple could leave with their baby, but it was not to be. She was discharged Friday to see her obstetrician on Long Island.

The baby, Victor Emanuel, came the next day.

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Frank Becerra Jr./The Journal News

Victorino Discua Maldonado: "It's new heart and new baby. My God, it's beautiful."



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Rosa Discua and her husband, Victorino Discua Maldonado, were awaiting the birth of their first child just days after Maldonado received a new heart at Westchester Medical Center.