

A new door opens: How teamwork and a transplant gave a New Mexico mom a second chance (VIDEO)

One woman was running out of time — and options — as advanced liver disease threatened her life. Her case... so complex, she says another transplant center turned her away. But (Mar-ee-sell-uh Oh-leave-us) Maricela Olivas kept going — until a door finally opened at Mayo Clinic in Arizona. Allison Rodriguez has her story.

Maricela Olivas Liver Transplant Recipient	"I see a door. I see a big door. I said, 'This is my opportunity.'"
Reporter:	Maricela Olivas was ready for that door to swing open — to the possibility that she would finally receive the lifesaving liver transplant she needed.
Maricela Olivas	"I been suffering all these years, and my kids are suffering, my husband is suffering."
Reporter:	For more than five years, her liver disease had been getting progressively worse. She also developed a rare, life-threatening complication called hepatopulmonary syndrome.
BASHAR AQEL, M.D. TRANSPLANT HEPATOLOGY Mayo Clinic	"In her case, because of her liver disease, the blood was shunted away from her lungs, so she was not able to maintain the oxygenation of her body. She most likely, we're talking about only a few months of survival with her liver, if her liver disease and her hepatopulmonary syndrome was not addressed in a timely manner."
Reporter:	Because of these complications, Maricela had been turned away by another transplant center. Her case was too complex. But Dr. Aqel says that complexity is exactly why Mayo Clinic could help.

BASHAR AQEL, M.D.	"We have gathered a team of experts across multiple disciplines — surgeons, medical providers, nurses, nutritionists, social workers, they work together in harmony. In order to deliver the lifesaving transplant while maintaining some of the best outcomes in the nations.
Reporter:	That teamwork was vital, along with advanced life support such as extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, or ECMO.
BASHAR AQEL, M.D.	"It's a support system that will help to complement the work of the heart and the lungs when somebody is extremely sick. And they are not able to maintain adequate circulation or oxygenation of the body during some critical illness."
Reporter:	Maricela received the gift of a new liver in April 2026. The road to recovery was long though. She spent more than 100 days in the hospital, but she never lost her faith. And in early August, she was discharged and walked out to cheers and applause.
Maricela Olivas	"At the end of the line, I was jumping like crazy. I don't know how I get energy to jump, and I was happy."
Reporter:	Maricela came to Mayo Clinic hoping for a chance and determined to get better. Months later, she walked out and toward her new chapter. For the Mayo Clinic news network, I'm Allison Rodriguez.