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# Liver Transplant Makes Medical History

**"I have a new life," says Ms. Colombo after a history-making liver transplant that replaced her 46-pound organ with a normal one of around 11-pounds.**

Debora Colombo, 52, a management/technology consultant and motivational coach from Basking Ridge, New Jersey, found out that she had polycystic liver disease 13 years ago. In her case, the disease, a genetic condition in which cysts form on the liver, affected her entire liver. Although its function was normal, its growth was not. That growth, which went on throughout Ms. Colombo's 40s, resulted in a diseased liver that weighed an unheard of 46 pounds. A normal liver, in comparison, weighs about three pounds, while the largest liver previously, according to the Guinness Book of World Records, weighed 21 pounds.



Carroll NEWS

## Debora Colombo, after her surgery

Because her liver still functioned normally, despite its size, her original doctors believed she was ineligible for a transplant. Over time, however, Ms. Colombo experienced increasing difficulty in breathing, sleeping, standing for more than a few minutes, and eating more than a couple of bites of food at a time. Her liver had expanded through her chest cavity and was displacing all her other organs. "After the first year [of being diagnosed], I started to look pregnant," says Ms. Colombo. "And it kept growing. I was being crushed to death. I had no quality of life left. I didn't see any reason to keep going."

But that feeling changed the first time Ms. Colombo met with Myron E. Schwartz, MD, Director of Adult Liver Transplantation and Hepatobiliary Surgery in the Recanati/Miller Transplantation Institute. At the urging of her ex-husband and caregiver, Robert Colombo, Ms. Colombo asked for a referral to Mount Sinai because she wanted to see if one of the liver specialists could remove part of the diseased liver, at a minimum. Ms. Colombo recalls that, after Dr. Schwartz viewed the CT scan, "He walked into the room and said, 'I can't do anything with your liver, but I can offer you a liver transplant.' When I said I'd been told that wasn't a possibility, he explained there was an appeals process."

"In most people with polycystic disease," Dr. Schwartz told the Daily News, "the liver grows no larger than 11 pounds or so, and they don't need an organ transplant. But in Ms. Colombo's case, the size of her liver had become life-threatening." For Ms. Colombo, finding out that a transplant was possible was a miracle—which became a reality on January 16, when she got the call telling her a liver had been found.

It took Dr. Schwartz more than 12 hours to perform the operation. "We needed not only to transplant a normal-sized liver," he explains, "but to reconstruct her entire inner architecture."

"I have a new life," says Ms. Colombo. "I think about living now. I want to give back to Mount Sinai and to the planet. Both Robert and I have ideas about patient care and maybe

starting a foundation for people who need transplants or have rare diseases. We want Mount Sinai to be recognized as the best transplant center in the country, not only for its outstanding staff, but for its outstanding patient care and unique use of technology."

In addition to the Daily News, Ms. Colombo's remarkable liver transplant was covered by the UPI wire service, as well as WWOR TV, WOR Radio, and WCBS News Radio. Several television programs have also expressed interest in presenting Ms. Colombo's story. In addition, reports on the surgery will be published in Surgery News and Gastroenterology and Endoscopy News.

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[Myron E. Schwartz, MD](#)

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