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Baby born to mother who had been brain dead for four months

By James Badcock in Madrid

DOCTORS in Portugal have delivered a healthy baby boy almost four months after his mother was declared brain dead due to a cerebral haemorrhage.

In what could be a world first, the baby was delivered by caesarean section on Tuesday, after his mother was declared brain dead on Feb 20.

Doctors at Lisbon Central hospital said the baby boy weighs just under 5lb 3oz and appears perfectly healthy.

While the body of his 37-year-old mother was being kept alive mechanically, obstetricians monitored the foetus, eventually deciding to carry out the delivery once he had reached 32 weeks of gestation, well beyond the minimal foetal viability phase of around 24 weeks.

The case tops other recent reported instances of foetuses surviving long periods in the womb after the mothers

have suffered brain death. In January a boy was born in Poland after surviving 55 days inside his brain-dead mother, while in 2013 Hungarian doctors delivered a baby which was kept alive in similar circumstances for 13 weeks.

"This is a record. It's amazing," Luís Graça, the president of the Portuguese Society of Obstetrics and Maternal Medicine, told the newspaper *Público*.

He said: "They were lucky that the mother hung in there all that time. Most women die in these situations.

"It is extremely difficult to keep the pregnant woman alive by mechanical means while ensuring that the foetus advances," he said.

When the woman was declared brain dead, doctors at the hospital assessed the health of the foetus and consulted with her family who, they stressed, had the final say on whether to try to keep her body functioning long enough to complete gestation.