Webcasts / Kidney Swap

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UCLA Medical Center Performs Its First Living Donor Kidney “Swap”

UCLA Medical Center on Sept. 20 performed its first living donor kidney "swap," a procedure in which a loved one of a kidney transplant patient who is not compatible as a donor exchanges organs with another incompatible pair under an innovative new paired donation program. UCLA aims to lead the way for other Southern California transplant centers to adopt this life-enhancing procedure. The program seeks to address the acute shortage of organs by enlarging the pool of living donors who want to donate a kidney to a family member or friend but can't due to issues such as incompatible blood types. With so many people waiting for so few available organs, patients can wait up to six years for a cadaver kidney transplant. Nearly 16,000 people are on the kidney transplant waiting list in California, according to statistics from the United Network for Organ Sharing.

Here's the way the UCLA exchange worked: Tiffany Furuya wanted to donate a kidney to her father, Kazuyuki Furuya, and Jason Williams wanted to give one to his mother, Stella Williams. But neither Tiffany nor Jason were compatible matches with their respective parents. However, the UCLA transplant team found that Tiffany was a match for Stella and Jason was compatible with Kazuyuki. Both families were willing and met for the first time after surgery.

In a twist to the story, Kazuyuki Furuya was offered a deceased donor kidney a few weeks before the exchange was to take place, so Tiffany would not have had to donate her kidney. But she insisted on going through with the procedure so the deceased donor kidney would remain available to help another person who did not have a live donor.

Thus, three people were untethered from dialysis machines — and given an improved quality of life.

UCLA has one of the world's most active kidney transplant programs and has introduced a number of innovations, including the first paired kidney donation program in Southern California, said Dr. Albin Gritsch, associate professor of urology and surgical director of the kidney transplantation program.

"We hope that this procedure will improve the availability of organs for thousands of patients with end-stage renal disease who would benefit from a transplant," he said.
Very few paired kidney donations have been performed at U.S. transplant centers. Congress is now considering legislation regarding paired donations, and Medicare pays for the procedure.

"The profession has been slow to adopt 'kidney swap' procedures, but we are hopeful that our program will help encourage other transplant centers to participate, which will greatly help expand the potential donor pool," said Dr. Jeffrey Veale, an assistant professor of urology specializing in renal transplantation at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

Many people would like to give a kidney to a loved one but are often disappointed when they learn they are not a match. The UCLA program offers a viable option for patients which will also help another family.

"The paired donation procedure permits donors who would otherwise be unable to help their loved one to do so in a manner that helps other people as well," said Dr. Gabriel Danovitch, professor of medicine in the UCLA Division of Nephrology and medical director of the UCLA kidney and pancreas transplantation program.

(Editors: B-roll footage of donors meeting their recipients for the first time after surgery and video interviews with the transplant team are available. The footage can also be viewed at http://streaming.uclahealth.org/kidneyswapucla using Windows Media.)

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