Hepatitis C Positive Organ Donors

April 2, 2018 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

"Organ donation is a testimony of love for our neighbor." ~Pope Francis

April is National Donate Life Month. In the United States, 95 percent of Americans are in favor of being a donor but only 54 percent are registered. Which category are you in?

Perhaps you are under the impression that having hepatitis C disqualifies you from donating. However, this is no longer true. The organ donor rules regarding who can donate and who can receive are changing. For instance, in 2016, a team at Johns Hopkins performed the first organ transplants between HIV-positive patients in the United States. The liver and kidney came from the same HIV-positive donor. The kidney went to a patient who has been HIV-positive for 30 years. The liver went to a person with hepatitis C and has been HIV-positive for more than 25 years. Two peoples' lives were changed substantially by this ultimate gift from a deceased donor.

People with hepatitis C have been eligible to donate organs for many years, although not every transplant center has accepted them. Research shows that for a hepatitis C-positive recipient, the outcomes are the same whether you have a hepatitis C-negative or –positive organ. Now that we can cure hepatitis C, the transplant guidelines are changing. Other transplant programs are following suit.

In 2016, the University of Pennsylvania performed a kidney transplant using an organ from a hepatitis C-positive donor. The recipient was then treated for hepatitis C. Since this pioneering surgery, the doors have been opened at both Penn and Johns Hopkins University allowing patients on kidney transplant waiting lists to jump ahead in line if they are willing to receive an organ infected with hepatitis C. These two transplant centers believe that this strategy will save lives by potentially allowing hundreds more kidneys to be transplanted every year.

This means that finding a cure for hepatitis C isn't just good news for those who have this disease; it is good news for the more than 99,000 people on the United Network of Organ Sharing's (UNOS) national kidney waiting list. Until recently, the severe organ shortage has only been able to provide kidneys for approximately 17,000 people on that list. Every day, approximately 13 people die waiting for a kidney. The rest suffer the relentless but lifesaving misery of dialysis. All this is changing.

Please register as an organ donor and help to raise awareness about this lifesaving gift.

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http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/blog/hepatitis-c-positive-organ-donors