Live Organ Donation

April 17, 2017 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

Blogging daily in April in recognition of National Donate Life Month. Please register as an organ donor and help to raise awareness about this lifesaving gift.

There is a huge organ shortage in the United States. Live organ donation provides more livers to help fill this need. However, living liver donation is a complicated prospect, filled with risk and ethical issues. A few donors have died from post-surgical complications. It is hard to reconcile putting a healthy person's life at risk, even for a noble cause.

The first live organ donation occurred in 1954; the first live liver donation was in 1989. Less than a half of a percent of all liver transplant surgeries use organs from living donors. The vast majority of live liver donors are relatives of the transplant recipients.

We can't survive without a liver, so you may wonder how a healthy human could donate. The answer lies in the liver's amazing powers of regeneration. Live donor transplantation uses less than half of the liver. After the surgery, the donor's liver returns to 90 to 100 percent of its original size in about 2 months. The same is true for the recipient—in about two months, the donated liver regenerates to its needed size. If the recipient is a child, the liver segment will grow with the child.

Transplanting a liver from a living donor is a major surgical procedure. There is a lot to consider. There may be financial risks or hardship to the donor. In some cases, life insurance policies may be denied or canceled, so this needs to be checked out prior to donation. If donation presents a financial hardship for the donor, there are funds for those who qualify. For more information, see the link at the end of this article for National Living Donor Assistance.

Here are some resources to assist you in exploring the options about live organ donation.

- American Transplant Foundation www.americantransplantfoundation.org
- Living Donors Online http://livingdonorsonline.org/liver
- National Living Donor Assistance www.livingdonorassistance.org
- Organ Procurement and Transplant Network http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov
- Transplant Living www.transplantliving.org
- United Network for Organ Sharing www.unos.org

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