Yes, You Can Have Hepatitis C and Be an Organ Donor

April 6, 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.

In my mind, the best news for people living with hepatitis C is the fact that this disease is curable. It is also 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 year, nearly 4 percent die waiting. The rest suffer the relentless but lifesaving misery of dialysis. All this is changing.

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 small step is huge one, and paves the way for other organ transplantation surgeries. Hepatitis C-positive livers have long been an option for hepatitis C-positive patients on the liver transplant waiting list. However, now that hep C is curable, those of us with organs in good condition can potentially give this amazing gift.

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