

My experience with kidney transplantation

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In August 2007, my mother was admitted to hospital with generalized fatigue and gastrointestinal symptoms. The doctors discovered that her creatinine level was high. Within 48 hours she was in complete renal failure and on dialysis, due to what we later found out was Goodpasture disease. A difficult situation was made worse as my mother had to go through heparin-induced thrombocytopenia, pulmonary edema requiring bilevel positive airway pressure, a nasogastric tube, delirium and a coronary angiography. This was the most difficult situation my family had ever experienced.

Born and raised in Montréal, Que., I grew up in a typical family. Ever since I can remember, my mother was either helping me with my homework or teaching me something new. She taught me right from wrong, how to read and write, and how to be a caring and loving individual. Through this most difficult situation, one thing became clear to me: my mother is the strongest person I know. Even through her ordeal, she remained the tower of strength and the heart and soul of our family unit.

Soon after my mother's condition was stabilized, it became evident that she would need a kidney transplant. My decision to donate a kidney was at first frightening, but not a difficult one to make as my mother had given me everything I could ever ask for. I felt blessed and honoured to have had the opportunity to help her in such a significant and tangible way.

From July to October 2008, while completing my renal transplant rotation as part of my urology training, I assisted in over 30 live kidney and cadaveric kidney donations. It was during this rotation that I learned the benefits of live kidney donation. Removing my mother from dialysis in order to improve not only her quality of life but also her overall health was very important to me. Also, I wanted my mother to receive a kidney that would last the rest of her life; the only way to do this was to give her a live kidney. With live kidney transplants, there is less chance of rejection, and, furthermore, because of the circumstances surrounding the actual transplant, live kidney donations often have a better outcome than cadaveric kidney donations.

It was during this rotation that I approached the head of the live kidney donations department to convey to him my intention to donate my kidney to my mother.

The decision to donate my kidney affected a lot of people, the most important of whom was my wife. My wife's love and support was paramount in my decision and gave me the strength to proceed with the surgery.

In preparation for the transplant, I had to undergo multiple exams to ensure I was physically and mentally fit to undergo surgery with minimal complications. From the beginning, it was clear that my health and well-being was the primary concern for our treating team and that they would not continue if my well-being was endangered. With the surgery performed laparoscopically, not only were the potential complications limited, but my recovery time was much faster than if I had undergone an open renal donation. In spite of this, I had many concerns, having witnessed many renal transplants first hand. Being a urology resident was a challenging situation. On the one hand, I knew every detail of the procedure, but on the other hand this knowledge created many hours of worrying. In the end, I came to terms with the realization that I needed to place my trust in the surgeons and believe that everything would go well.

On Jan. 6, 2009, I underwent a left nephrectomy and my mother underwent the kidney transplant operation. With the operation, her creatinine level dropped from 492 to 90 in 3 days! Three days after the transplant, I left the hospital with no complications and very little discomfort. My mother remained at the hospital a little longer because of minor complications, but showed no signs of rejection. To this day, she remains healthy and has shown no signs of rejecting the kidney. This kidney transplant gave my mother new life and ended her suffering. Her present health was worth the operation and any discomfort it caused me.

As a urology resident, I have operated on and treated many transplant patients. Even being aware of the possible complications associated with live donations, I still decided to donate my kidney. As you are reading this article, my hope is that, should you be faced with the decision of donating an organ, you will do it, just as I did.

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