

TRANSPLANT NEWS

COURTESY OF
TRANSPLANT SERVICES AT UPMC HARRISBURG

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UPMC Harrisburg

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MEET OUR NEWEST TEAM MEMBERS



Evan Aravich, LCSW
Transplant Social Worker

I joined the UPMC Harrisburg Transplant Services team in August 2023 with previous inpatient transplant experience working with both pediatric and adult liver, kidney, small bowel, and pancreas transplant recipients. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and have spent most of my career working in healthcare. Recently, I have applied to become a Certified Clinical Transplant Social Worker (CCTSW) through the Society for Transplant Social Workers (STSW). When I am not working, I enjoy traveling, skateboarding, surfing, spending time with my family, vacationing in the Florida Keys, and going to concerts.



Christie Selert
Medical Assistant

I started with the UPMC Harrisburg Transplant Services team at the beginning of August 2023. Prior to being hired at UPMC, I worked in the health care field for 12 years, with most of my work in skilled nursing facilities and rehab centers. One of my favorite parts of my role is getting to know the incredible stories of our patients. When I am not working, I like to spend time outdoors with my family camping, hiking, and kayaking.

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

It's a wonderful gesture to thank someone who has donated a kidney. Here are some ways to express gratitude to a donor:

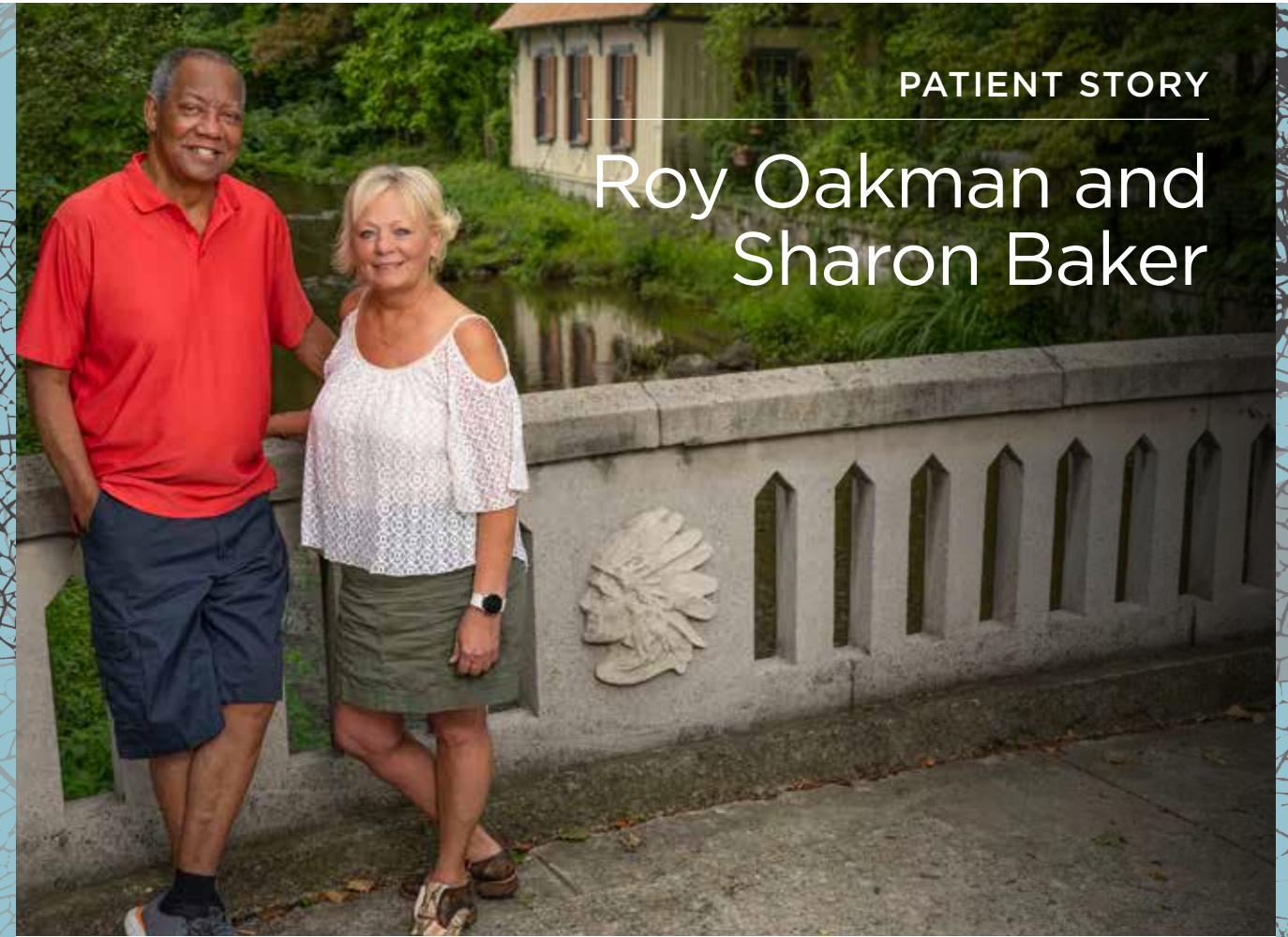
1. Write a thank-you note: A handwritten note is a heartfelt way to express your gratitude. You can thank the donor for their selflessness and generosity. Share how the transplant has impacted your life and what you are looking forward to doing now that you have regained your health.
2. Send a thoughtful gift: Consider sending a thoughtful gift to the donor, such as a bouquet of flowers, a gift basket, or a personalized item. You can also donate to a charity in their name.
3. Say it in person: If possible, meet with the donor in person to express your gratitude. You can thank them for their gift and share how much it has impacted your life.
4. Share your story: Consider sharing your story with others to raise awareness about organ donation. You can inspire others to become donors and help save lives.

Remember, the most important thing is to express your gratitude in a way that feels authentic and meaningful to you. The donor will appreciate your heartfelt thanks and will be happy to know that their gift has made a positive impact on your life.



PATIENT STORY

Roy Oakman and Sharon Baker



In 2008, Roy's doctor suspected something wasn't right with his kidneys. A Marine veteran with 30 years of service, Roy started going to the VA regularly for blood work. He felt fine until blood test results sent him to the emergency department in 2021. Roy's blood showed dangerously high potassium levels, a symptomless condition called hyperkalemia. His kidneys weren't eliminating the extra potassium in his body — a sign of kidney failure.

Roy's nephrologist sent him to UPMC Harrisburg Transplant Services. Roy remembers saying, "A transplant? I'm too old for that. And who's going to give me a kidney?" But Roy's tests showed he was eligible for a transplant. "It was time to put the word out and find a kidney," he says.

First, he went to his local American Legion. They put flyers up, posted about Roy on their website, and Roy found a military website strictly for veterans who need a transplant and for those who are interested in donating. Roy's wife, Karen, was getting the word out, too.

"I'd never really thought about organ donation until Karen approached me," his sister-in-law, Sharon, says. "I thought, if I can help Roy, I'll try. He's family."

In April 2022, Sharon traveled to UPMC Harrisburg Transplant Services to find out whether she was healthy enough to be a donor — and to see whether her kidney was a good match for Roy. She was a match! "I was stunned. It was the best feeling imaginable," says Sharon. The transplant was scheduled for Aug. 30, 2022. With living donor organ transplants, the recipient and the donor go into surgery on the same day — the donor first and then the recipient. "We have a great photo of us goofing around before our surgery," says Sharon. "It's a great memory."

The surgeries were a success. Sharon is feeling fine after donating. As for Roy, he feels back to normal. "I'm relaxing and taking care of this new kidney," he says. "I'm on the right road — everything is working like it's supposed to."

APRIL IS NATIONAL DONATE LIFE MONTH!

April is National Donate Life Month, a time when donors are recognized and appreciated for their selfless acts of giving life to someone in need. At UPMC, we celebrate throughout the month of April!



Every year, local teams participate in the Donor Dash, hosted by the Gift of Life program. The UPMC Pinnacle Foundation partners with the UPMC Transplant Services team to provide local transplant team members, living donors, recipients, friends, and family with transportation to the Dash in Philadelphia.

The event is a fun-filled day of walking, running, and engaging with one another to honor organ and tissue donors, celebrate transplant recipients, and recognize those waiting for a lifesaving transplant. Every year, more than 10,000 people participate in the Donor Dash in person or virtually, and the UPMC Transplant Services team representing our central Pa. footprint is proud to be among them. Donate Life Month would not exist without the generosity of our donors and donor families.



During last year's Donate Life Month celebration, the transplant team at UPMC Harrisburg painted rocks to spread the word about living kidney donation.

The beautiful rocks have been placed in the flower beds around the UPMC Harrisburg campus. During our Donate Life Flag Raising Ceremony last year, an announcement was made about the rocks, encouraging everyone to take one and hide it anywhere they would like, with the goal of having someone else find it and spread the word. Pictures of found rocks featuring these words of encouragement were shared on social media.



HOW TO OBSERVE NATIONAL DONATE LIFE MONTH



SAVE THE DATE

DONATE LIFE FLAG RAISING CELEBRATION

April 5 at 11 a.m.

UPMC Harrisburg
Flag Pole Courtyard
111 S. Front St., Harrisburg

- **PARTICIPATE IN AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS**

- > Look for local Donate Life community representatives. They will promote campaigns and conversations about registering as an organ donor during April. Be present and collaborate.

- **DRESS IN BLUE AND GREEN**

- > Blue and green are the official colors of Donate Life. They represent heaven and earth, and how the lives of those who are no longer with us can help the lives of those who are still here. Spread the message by wearing blue and green this April.

- **REGISTER AS A DONOR**

- > The main objective of National Donate Life Month is to increase the number of organ, eye, and tissue donors. Educate yourself and register. Donors can save dozens of lives.



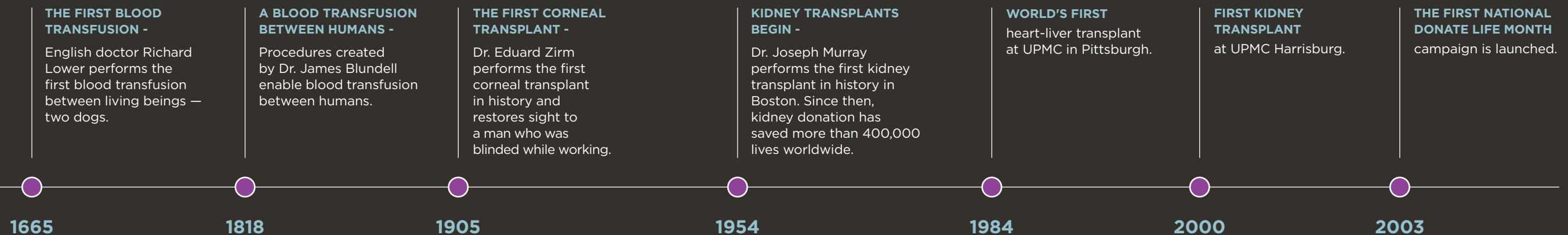
PRE-TRANSPLANT PATIENTS

While patients are waiting for transplant, it is important to keep up with routine health maintenance screenings. UPMC Harrisburg Transplant Services has recently changed its policy about screening colonoscopies.

- Individuals 45 years or older, or those with a family history of colon cancer, will be required to complete this study prior to being listed for a kidney transplant.
- A colonoscopy is one of several cancer screenings that must be completed prior to transplantation. It is essential for pre-transplant patients to complete a colonoscopy due to the immunosuppression medications they will be given after kidney transplant. These medications prevent the body from rejecting a transplanted organ, but they impair the body's cancer surveillance mechanisms. Therefore, it is imperative to have a colonoscopy completed prior to transplant.
- For women, in addition to the colonoscopy, a yearly screening mammogram, along with a recommended gynecologic exam and/or pap smear, must also be completed.

Be proactive and speak with your primary care provider to schedule these screening exams. Our transplant coordinators will review this information with you during your annual appointment. If you have any questions prior to your appointment, please contact your coordinator.

NATIONAL DONATE LIFE MONTH TIMELINE



THE IMPORTANCE OF PHOSPHORUS

Phosphorus is an important mineral to keep bones, muscles, and blood vessels healthy. This is a mineral that is commonly depleted after kidney transplant, as the body now has a healthy kidney that is excreting minerals and electrolytes more quickly.

It is common for kidney transplant patients to start taking supplements to help maintain a healthy phosphorus level. Another way to increase phosphorus levels is through diet. Adding foods higher in phosphorus to their diet may prevent a patient from needing supplements, but this is not always the case. There are also circumstances when the level can be too high. Patients with high phosphorus levels might be asked to avoid certain foods and incorporate others. Many packaged foods have added phosphorus, so it is important to read ingredient labels. Refer to the table for food options.

How can you tell if your phosphorus level is low, high, or normal? Post-transplant patients are asked to follow their lab schedule and obtain blood work, which includes a phosphorus level. Obtaining blood work as directed is the best way to maintain healthy levels and know when adjustments are necessary.

FOODS WITH HIGH PHOSPHORUS LEVELS

Meat, Poultry, Fish

Dairy Products

Beans and Lentils

Nuts

Bran Cereals and Oatmeal

Colas and Bottled Iced Teas

FOODS WITH LOW PHOSPHORUS LEVELS

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Rice Milk

Bread

Pasta and Rice

Corn and Rice Cereals

Light-Colored Sodas

DEVELOPING YOUR FINANCIAL PLAN FOR TRANSPLANT

As part of the transplant evaluation process, your social worker will ask you to identify a financial plan for transplant. This is to ensure you do not experience financial hardship following your transplant surgery. Things to consider include basic needs such as food and housing, transplant medications, and other out-of-pocket expenses like transportation, lodging, and childcare.

If you are working at the time of transplant, you can expect to be off work between 8-12 weeks. Talk to your employer now to determine what benefits you have available to you and whether your time off of

work will be paid or unpaid (Family and Medical Leave Act, Short- or Long-Term Disability, or Paid Time Off).

If you are on dialysis, you may consider applying for Social Security Disability Insurance to assist you until you are in recovery from your transplant and can return to work.

Managing these expenses can be overwhelming, so please talk to your transplant social worker so they can help you develop a financial plan. The more you are prepared for transplant, the more you can focus on your recovery!

PATIENT STORY

Molly Yang



Molly Yang is a nurse, so when she noticed unusual symptoms — swelling and small white spots on her legs — after a short flight to see her family in Michigan in 2006, she was worried. Molly called her doctor and told him she thought something was going on with her kidneys. She was right.

“I really didn’t feel sick at all,” says Molly. “I’m glad the nephrologist sent me for a kidney biopsy. It showed I have an autoimmune disease called IgA.” IgA is a rare kidney disease that can lead to kidney failure. It occurs when a buildup of proteins interferes with the kidneys’ ability to filter waste from the blood.

Steroids and blood pressure medicine slowed the progression of her kidney disease. But in 2016, Molly had to start peritoneal dialysis at home, and in 2019, she switched to hemodialysis. “I felt better and had more energy after just a few sessions,” says Molly. But her kidney disease worsened, and she was placed on the transplant list.

Molly’s family has always been a source of strength. Her older sister volunteered to be her kidney donor. While initial testing showed she was a match, her final bloodwork disqualified her. Other family members also stepped up.

“My younger sister tested twice, and my niece came in from Wisconsin to be tested, but neither matched,” says Molly. “I kept up hope for a donor.”

On Oct. 31, 2022, Molly finally got the call from the UPMC Harrisburg Transplant Services team that a deceased donor organ was available. She went into surgery at 5 a.m. the following day. After the five-hour transplant, Molly remembers her surgeon, Danielle Ladie, MD, reassuring her that it went well. “I was in some pain, but when the nurse inserted a catheter, everything started working exactly as it should. I was relieved — it was a very good outcome,” she says.

Her three daughters — ages 21, 19, and 17 — were her rocks, emotionally and physically. “Whatever I needed, they were there,” says Molly. “They took me to doctor appointments and went for groceries. But most important of all, they were by my side throughout.”

As far as recovery, Molly says that “after two and a half months, I’d had enough of staying home — I needed to get moving! So, I did. Now, I’m feeling so much better and have much more energy.”

NATIONAL KIDNEY REGISTRY VOUCHER PROGRAM

THE NATIONAL KIDNEY REGISTRY (NKR) created a program to facilitate transplants between incompatible donors and recipients, or to acquire a better match. This program also allows donors to donate at their convenience. Donors who choose the voucher program are covered by Donor Shield, which provides living donor assistance such as lost wage reimbursement, travel and lodging expenses, and living kidney prioritization in the unlikely event you ever need a kidney.

Why Donate Through the Voucher Program?

- You are not compatible with your recipient.
- You are compatible with your recipient, but you want a better match.
- You want to donate now, but your recipient is not ready for transplant.
- You want to donate now and be recovered to assist your recipient after their transplant.
- You want to protect your family members or friends if they ever need a kidney transplant.

Learn More About the Different Programs

The Standard Voucher Program

- Allows you to donate according to your schedule while providing a voucher to your recipient who is expected to need a kidney transplant within one year.
- The voucher can be redeemed when your recipient is ready for transplant.

- In this program, you can name up to five family members or friends as back-up in the event your intended recipient receives a deceased donor transplant or is no longer eligible for transplant.

The Family Voucher Program

- Allows you to donate according to your schedule while providing a voucher for up to five family members or friends in case one of them ever needs a kidney transplant.
- In the event one of the people you named as a voucher holder needs a kidney transplant, they will be prioritized for a living kidney through the NKR.
- Only one family voucher can be redeemed and must be at an NKR participating facility.

To learn more about this program, visit <https://www.kidneyregistry.org/for-donors/voucher-program/>

SIMPLE MEAL IDEAS FOR MY KIDNEYS

Simple Breakfast Ideas

- 2 scrambled eggs and ½ English muffin and cantaloupe or melon.
- Toasted mini bagel with cream cheese and 1 cup sliced strawberries.
- Mini bagel with nut butter and 1 cup of mixed berries.

Overnight oats

Mix ½ cup old-fashioned oats (not quick) and ½ cup almond or soy milk in a small jar. Add vanilla extract or drizzle honey to taste. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Add toppings and serve:

- 1 Tbsp almonds slivers or crushed peanuts
- 1 Tbsp dried cranberries
- ½ cup mixed berries
- Small amount of Greek yogurt or nut butter

Simple Lunch or Dinner Ideas

- Cook your favorite pasta. Add garlic shrimp, olive oil, and 1 Tbsp parmesan. Serve with zucchini or broccoli.
- Make a tuna salad sandwich. Use low-sodium tuna or rinse well. Serve with fresh coleslaw or carrot sticks and low-sodium dip. Or try chicken salad.
- Spread low-sodium hummus on a wheat tortilla. Add lettuce, red peppers, and ¼ avocado. Roll up into a wrap.
- Make simple veggie tacos with cumin seasoning, no added salt canned black beans, 1 minute rice, fresh cabbage, cilantro, and onion.
- Try a low sodium homemade pizza using an English muffin cut in half, a tomato slice, mozzarella cheese, and oregano.



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UPMC
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Join the UPMC Central Pa. Transplant Team for the 2024 **DONOR DASH IN PHILADELPHIA** SUNDAY, APRIL 28 | \$35 PER PERSON

Registration includes round trip transportation to Philadelphia and a free UPMC shirt for the first 100 registrants.

The Donor Dash is hosted by the Gift of Life Donor Program in Philadelphia. Participants can select from a 10K or 5K run, or a 3K walk. The dash will start at the Navy Yard.

SCHEDULE:

6 a.m.	Leave Harrisburg	10:15 a.m.	Kids Fun Run (ages 6 and under)
8 a.m.	On-Site Registration Opens	10:30 a.m.	Stage Show
9:15 a.m.	10K Run	11 a.m.	3K Walk
9:30 a.m.	5K Run	4 p.m.	Arrive in Harrisburg

REGISTER
TODAY AT:



*A special thank you
to the UPMC
Pinnacle Foundation
for sponsoring the
transportation.*

