

TRANSPLANT NEWS

COURTESY OF
TRANSPLANT SERVICES AT UPMC HARRISBURG

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MEET OUR NEWEST TEAM MEMBERS



Manish Gupta, MD
Transplant surgeon

Dr. Gupta is an American Board of surgery certified general surgeon who completed his surgical residency at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center. In addition, he completed a transplant surgery research fellowship prior to commencing a Multi-Organ Transplant surgery fellowship at University of Cincinnati. He is a graduate of the Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University. Dr. Gupta serves on the Medical Advisory and Policy board for the Gift of Life Donor Program. In addition to organ transplant, he has a special interest in Vascular Access Surgery and Endocrine Surgery.

In his free time, Dr. Gupta is an avid golfer and enjoys traveling and cooking.



Faizan Syed, MD

Dr. Syed specializes in nephrology and transplant surgery and is board certified in internal medicine and nephrology by the American Board of Internal Medicine. He completed his fellowship program at University of California at San Francisco - School of Medicine and University of Nebraska College of Medicine, residency program at Griffin Hospital - GME, and medical school at Allama Iqbal Medical College.



Jacolla Dunbar, RN
Quality nurse coordinator

Jacolla has been working in the health field for over 20 years, including stints in long-term care, home care pediatrics, drug and alcohol rehab, and acute care nursing. Her newest role is focused on ensuring that patients receive quality care throughout their journey, from surgery to the bedside, and eventually discharge.



Sharon Gouak, BSN
Clinical transplant coordinator

Sharon has been with UPMC since 2008 and over the last ten years she has worked in the operating room. Recently, she transitioned to the transplant team. She enjoys meeting new patients and assisting them with navigating the pre-transplant process. When Sharon isn't working, she enjoys spending time with her family, camping, and boating.



Rachel Manchester, RN
Post-transplant coordinator

Rachel began as a nurse over 24 years ago and has worked in a variety of specialties including: kidney and stem cell transplant, oncology, and plastic surgery. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her husband, kids and dogs doing a variety of outdoor activities, or relaxing with a good book.



Marilyn Soto
Financial coordinator

Transplant has always been very near to her heart. Twenty years ago, Marilyn was able to donate a kidney to her mother to help her avoid dialysis. Seeing her journey firsthand, pushes her daily to ensure that patient's insurance and payment processes are not a burden to them as they go through their journey with their loved ones.



Samantha Gutierrez
Administrative assistant

Coming to the United States from Peru over 20 years ago, Samantha has found a passion in working in health care. She loves learning about each prospective patient, understanding their stories and journeys, and treating them with empathy from the second they step foot into the office. In her spare time, she loves to spend time with her family, embracing their cultural heritage, and sharing traditions back with her son and daughter.

The Importance of Understanding the PRE-TRANSPLANT PROCESS

Starting the transplant process can be overwhelming. There is a lot to learn about your transplant journey. Fortunately, you have an entire team to help you along the way—from referral through years after your surgery!

The pre-transplant process starts at referral and continues until the day you are transplanted. During this time, you will have many appointments and diagnostic tests to ensure that transplant is the best option for you and to minimize your risks for complications at the time of surgery.

It is very important to read all information that comes from our office, and if you have any questions, please call to get clarification. It is also crucial to have your support person be involved in all steps of your evaluation. This will not only help you be prepared for transplant, but it will also help your support person understand the steps of your transplant journey and how they can assist you. While it is ideal to have the same support person for all appointments, a rotation of support people can be used throughout the process when necessary.

Here is a timeline of what to expect once you start your transplant process:

Your nephrologist or dialysis center sends a referral containing your information to our office, with the goal of scheduling your first two appointments. Your first appointment will be educational, where you learn about all aspects of transplant. You must attend this appointment before you can be seen for the evaluation appointment. The second appointment is the transplant evaluation where you will meet all members of our transplant team. Please understand that if either of these appointments are missed, it may be several months until you can be rescheduled, due to the number of people awaiting appointments.

- After your evaluation appointment, you will be contacted by your pre-transplant coordinator to discuss the plan of care for your evaluation. This plan will include additional appointments, consultations, and diagnostic testing.
- Please keep in mind that some tests will have specific instructions that must be followed in preparation for the test. Failure to follow these instructions will require you to reschedule the test, which will delay the next steps in your transplant process.

- Once you have completed the evaluation process, the information will be reviewed by the transplant selection committee. This committee consists of all members of the transplant team. The selection committee will determine if transplant is an appropriate form of treatment for your kidney disease.
- Once you have been approved to be put on the transplant list, your coordinator will schedule a time for you to sign a consent for transplant listing. At this appointment, we will discuss details that you need to know about being on the transplant list.
- When you are approved for transplant listing, you should encourage any potential living donors to call our office. Living kidney donation has many advantages for those awaiting transplant and our team strongly encourages everyone to consider this option.
- The wait time for deceased donor transplant can be many years. During this time, you will be seen in our office either once or twice a year, and you will need to update some of your testing. Your support person will need to attend these appointments with you.
- You will need to have blood work done on a regular basis to remain active on the list.
- It is very important to keep your transplant coordinator updated with any changes in your health, contact information, and insurance coverage while you are waiting for transplant. We have one hour to speak to you when we receive an organ offer on your behalf. If we cannot reach you in that time, you will be bypassed, and we will move to the next person on the list.

Communication with your transplant team is the most important thing you can do to remain prepared for transplant. We understand that you will have questions, and we are here to answer them for you. For any questions, please call our office weekdays between 7:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. at **717-231-8700** to speak to a member of our team.



SPREAD THE WORD!

A transplant can improve a person's quality of life, but unfortunately, there aren't enough kidney donors to match the current need. There are about 100,000 people on the waitlist awaiting a kidney transplant which is very daunting. People all over the world are stepping up to help others and change this statistic. These include family, friends, and even complete strangers, all becoming donor matches with the unified focus of trying to provide a better quality of life for others.

Thanks to today's modern technology, social media has become a platform for connecting with family, friends, and even complete strangers with potential donors. Success stories have been fostered by people who have shared the following on social media:

- Provide a personal background of your story.
- Educational posts about what kidney failure is and how it affects daily life.
- Posts that include current statistics of the deceased donor waitlist.
- Information about transplant centers and how to sign up to be a kidney donor.

Those unable to donate due to medical reasons or personal choice, can still be of help by sharing their story.

The Importance of MEDICATION ADHERENCE

Medication non-adherence is a major issue in kidney transplantation, and it is associated with increased risk of rejection and allograft loss. The goal is to prevent acute rejection or graft loss. Studies show that patients who are non-adherent with medications were at a greater risk for acute rejection. Graft failure may be much higher for a non-adherent patient versus a compliant patient.

Adherence begins as a pre-transplant patient by going to your doctor's appointments, taking your medications, and adhering to your dialysis schedule. This carries over to your post-transplant care. It is extremely important to be an active participant in your care.

- Keep an accurate and up to date medication list.
- Understand your medications.
- Do not start or stop any medications without alerting your transplant team.
- Be consistent with the timing of your medication – every 12 hours.
- Obtain your labs as ordered – timing is very important to be sure your immunosuppression medications are safe for you.

DON'T FORGET:

Contact your financial coordinator before an insurance change occurs.

- Insurance plans are more than co-pays and deductibles.
- Insurance plans often require pre-authorization prior to transplant.
- Insurance changes could place you out of network or change the tier of your insurance coverage.
- Lapses in communication with your insurance company during transition could delay your transplant procedure.



Corey's Story

COREY MURPHY – Finding new life from a deceased donor, corey reminds us all that organ donation is important, both as a living or deceased donor.

Since birth, I never experienced the normal life that a kid should. I was born with kidney failure, and as a child, you don't really know what that means. Since I had no family history of kidney disease, the diagnosis came as a surprise. Be that as it may, I began my fight for survival at a very young age. But when it came time for me to have a kidney transplant at age 48, I chose UPMC Harrisburg to lead me to a healthier way of life. They were close to where I live, and their staff was welcoming and supportive from day one.

I was on the transplant waiting list for about six years and began dialysis in 2011 to help maintain my kidney function. My mom and brother were my main support system through it all, taking me to and from the dialysis center and making sure I got all the medication and attention I needed to be ready for transplant. Even though most of my family lives out of state, that didn't stop them from calling me to see how I was doing or checking with my mother to see if there was any progress on finding a compatible kidney. We all kept the faith throughout the entire journey and never lost hope in the process. I trusted the system by believing that one day I would be transplanted and back to living the best life I could.

After six years of waiting for the most compatible donor, I got a call in September 2020 that I would be getting a new kidney from a deceased donor.

After the surgery, my mom was my rock. I went to stay at her house so she could help me in my recovery process and everything else I needed to regain my strength. I fish a lot now and play basketball when I have the time. I like catching big game fish like muskie, carp, and catfish, but I throw them all back. I just enjoy being back out there on the water and appreciating each and every day. When I was on dialysis, I saw a lot of other patients start to give up. You can't do that. You need to stay focused on the outcome and motivate yourself to reach the end goal. If you let your fears push you around, you'll never live the life you really want.

DO I NEED A SUPPORT PERSON?

Support is essential throughout your transplant journey, and it is very important that you have support in place to assist you before, during, and after transplant. Support can come from people we know, including friends, family members, neighbors, and coworkers. A support person does not need to have any medical knowledge or background to help. Having a primary support and secondary support persons is essential during your transplant journey.

Guidelines for Securing a Support Person

- Age 18 or older.
- Must participate in the pre-transplant evaluation process.
- Must be available to assist you at the time of transplant.
- Must be mentally and emotionally stable, including being free from any active substance use disorders.
- Access to a vehicle and valid driver's license.

What does a transplant support person do?

- Attends pre- and post-transplant appointments.
- Provides helpful reminders regarding appointments and medication.
- Provides transportation for you at times when you're unable to drive during the process.
- Learns helpful tips to prevent post-transplant complications.
- Stays with you following the transplant to ensure safety, medication compliance, and encourage movement!

Social workers can provide additional support, even offering phone calls to support persons to when questions arise during the transplant process. While it may be out of your comfort zone to ask for help, it is imperative to a successful transplant process.

WHO AM I?

Here are some clues:

- I talk to you about the risks and benefits of living kidney donation.
- I make sure you have all the information you need throughout all phases of donation.
- I remind you that you can opt out of being a living kidney donor at any time.
- I meet with you before and after surgery to make sure you are doing well.
- I encourage you to come to me if you have any concerns.
- I advocate for your best interest.

ANY GUESSES?

I am the Independent Living Donor Advocate (ILDA) for each one of our living kidney donors! It is my role to make sure donor's rights are protected, that a donor is fully informed in making their decision to donate, and to help figure out if donating is in a donor's best interest. I am here to provide support through all phases of the donor process and beyond.

To speak to your Independent Living Donor Advocate, call 717-213-3912.



Miranda's Story

The gift of life can often come from an unexpected source. Miranda, after a successful transplant is back on the sidelines coaching the game that she loves.

Miranda Nixon was 17 and headed to college on a full basketball scholarship when she was diagnosed with focal segmental glomerulosclerosis — a rare disease that causes scarring of the filters in the kidneys. Because her kidneys couldn't clean her blood properly, she developed high blood pressure that led to kidney damage. "They told me I'd need a transplant in 10 to 15 years," says Miranda. "Unfortunately, my disease progressed a lot faster."

Remarkably, Miranda enrolled at Holy Cross University where she earned a sociology degree in 2019. The 6-foot, 3-inch forward also played all four years on the women's basketball team. "I didn't feel that bad. But after graduating, everything snowballed," she says.

In July 2019 Miranda was hospitalized with blood pressure complications. By the following February, she was in acute renal failure. She began in-home dialysis and was put on the transplant list. After taking time off from her job as a behavioral health specialist, Miranda returned to work and even coached high school basketball while awaiting a kidney. "I decided to live my life as a somewhat normal 22-year-old. I didn't want to hold back," she says.

As her condition deteriorated, family members were evaluated as living donors but were unable to donate. Then Miranda's mother, Tina, put out a plea for a donor on social media.

Mary Oliveira says she will never forget the day she read the message posted by her friend and colleague: "I'm a desperate mom and my child needs help."

"My decision was instantaneous. I had to try and help Miranda," says Mary. After talking it over with her husband, she contacted UPMC Harrisburg Kidney Transplant Services to start the process. "Five months later they gave me the gift of calling Tina to give her the news," she says.

To allow Miranda to receive a kidney from a more compatible donor, the team encouraged Mary to participate in a paired exchange. Mary was approved as part of a paired exchange. "I had a moment or two of hesitation when they brought it up. But my daughter pointed out, 'You're actually saving two lives, not one.' That was humbling," says Mary.

Ironically, Miranda's transplant was canceled because her donor was exposed to COVID-19. But three months later, she got the call that another match had been found and underwent surgery in June 2021. Miranda returned to work as a behavioral health specialist and high school girls' basketball coach. "I'm so thankful to Mary. She made her donation months before I got my kidney. She was key to the whole thing," says Miranda. "I'm forever in her debt."

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About UPMC

A \$24 billion health care provider and insurer, Pittsburgh-based UPMC is inventing new models of patient-centered, cost-effective, accountable care. The largest nongovernmental employer in Pennsylvania, UPMC integrates more than 92,000 employees, 40 hospitals, 800 doctors' offices and outpatient sites, and a more than 4 million-member Insurance Services Division, the largest medical insurer in western Pennsylvania. In the most recent fiscal year, UPMC contributed \$1.5 billion in benefits to its communities, including more care to the region's most vulnerable citizens than any other health care institution, and paid more than \$900 million in federal, state, and local taxes. Working in close collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences, UPMC shares its clinical, managerial, and technological skills worldwide through its innovation and commercialization arm, UPMC Enterprises, and through UPMC International. U.S. News consistently ranks UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside among the nation's best hospitals in many specialties and ranks UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh on its Honor Roll of America's Best Children's Hospitals. For more information, go to [UPMC.com](https://www.upmc.com).

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UPMC Transplant Services Information Session

Saturday, Nov. 4, 2023
8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Hershey Lodge, Aztec Room
325 University Dr. | Hershey, PA 17033

Join UPMC for a free, in-person event to learn more about liver and kidney transplant.

During this event, UPMC liver and kidney transplant experts, including **Swaytha Ganesh, MD**, medical director of the UPMC Living Donor Program; and **Manish Gupta, MD**, associate surgical director, UPMC Harrisburg Kidney Transplant Services, will provide information about:

- The benefits of living donation
- The donor evaluation process
- Support resources and services offered by UPMC to aid in the search for a living donor, including the UPMC Living Donor Champion Program

To register, email your name and the total number of guests attending to transplant@upmc.edu by Saturday, Oct. 28.

For more information, visit [UPMC.com/Transplant](https://www.upmc.com/Transplant).