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## Actor Continues to Thrive After Receiving Hepatitis C Double Lung Transplant

In November 2018, Christopher Lemmon, 65, was in his hotel room after a performance at the Coronado Film Festival when he says he suddenly felt like he was falling off a cliff. “My wife says when she came into the room, I was blue.” The son of legendary actor Jack Lemmon was rushed to UC San Diego Medical Center in Hillcrest. “We were not familiar with the hospitals in the area so it was fate that we were taken there.”

Lemmon always considered himself healthy. “Until one day out of the blue at age 52 I had a pulmonary embolism.” He was diagnosed with Factor V Leiden, an inherited blood-clotting disorder that can increase risks of developing abnormal clot clots. Lemmon would have three pulmonary embolisms in subsequent years, including one that happened 32,000 feet in the air while traveling abroad.

“I also experienced a large pulmonary embolism, called a saddle embolus, that was life-threatening. I should have been gone after that one.” He was then afflicted with another pulmonary condition, called idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), a disease that causes scarring (fibrosis) of the lungs.

The performance in Coronado was to be one of his last before undergoing final evaluations for lung transplant consideration near his home in Connecticut. But that night changed everything. He was admitted to UC San Diego Medical Center for severe inflammation of his lungs from IPF, called an IPF exacerbation. This sudden acceleration of disease landed him in critical condition in need of a double lung transplant.

“Mr. Lemmon was in a dire situation when he arrived at UC San Diego Health,” said Kamyar Afshar, DO, medical director of lung transplant at UC San Diego Health. “He was evaluated for lung transplantation and deemed to be a suitable candidate. He was very ill and did not have much time left.”

Eugene Golts, MD, surgical director of [lung transplant at UC San Diego Health](#), said, “He was placed on ambulatory extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO). The technology supports or replaces the patient’s lung function while waiting for donor lungs for transplantation. At UC San Diego Health, we continue to provide innovative therapies for our lung transplant candidates and recipients.”

After nine days in the hospital, a pair of lungs became available from a deceased donor who had been infected with hepatitis C. “I was too sick to understand what was going on, but my beloved wife immediately agreed to accept the lungs,” said Lemmon.

“After a few months of medication following the lung transplant, the hepatitis C was eradicated,” said Afshar.

“When I woke up from surgery and saw my wife looking down at me, it hit me that I had a near-death experience,” said Lemmon. “My entire medical team was brilliant. From the surgeons and physicians to the all the nurses. There are not enough words to express my gratitude.”

Lemmon says it took him approximately six weeks to start feeling more like himself. Now, more than three years after the transplant, Lemmon says he has had no infections or signs of rejection. “I want to say a sincere thank you to my donor. This individual saved my life. Everyone should become a donor. It gives people like me a second chance.”

— *Michelle Brubaker*



*Christopher Lemmon (center) with his family.*

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