

UC San Diego Center for Transplantation Celebrates 40 th Anniversary

County's First Kidney Transplant Performed Four Decades Ago

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Four decades and more than 2,400 transplants later, the Center for Transplantation at UC San Diego Medical Center is celebrating the 40th anniversary of San Diego County's first kidney transplant, which was also the first organ transplant ever performed in San Diego. Since 1968, caring for patients with kidney ailments has vastly improved, with UC San Diego physician-researchers at the forefront of advancing care for patients with kidney disease.

"We have plenty to celebrate. With newer drugs and better understanding of old problems, we transplant specialists have much more to offer," said David Ward, M.D., F.R.C.P, professor of medicine, UC San Diego School of Medicine and co-director of Transplant Nephrology, UCSD-Kidney Transplant Program. "Our 40th anniversary is a good time to remind the community of what we have achieved. We really mean it when we say 'we can do it together' to promote the maximum life span for each patient's transplanted kidney."

Donna Melnychenko lives in Temecula but makes regular trips to San Diego for her continuing transplant care. "UC San Diego Medical Center is worth it! I credit my long-term survival to the grace of God and the team at UC San Diego," said Melnychenko. "They really pay attention to patients... they remember things about me and my life that most other people wouldn't pay attention to."

"This is a landmark event for UC San Diego Medical Center," said Ajai Khanna, M.D., Ph.D., Director, Abdominal Transplant Programs. "For decades now, UC San Diego academic physicians in different areas of kidney transplant have worked together to apply cutting edge research and surgical techniques to patient care, maintaining a success rate at or above the national average."

Across the nation, transplant professionals are beginning to realize the need for clinics that deal with preserving kidney transplant function as well as the other special health issues of the transplant patient. "We can't let our guard down. Kidney transplants can last five years or 25 years. It depends on how well the patient takes care of the kidney," explained Robert Steiner, M.D., Director of Transplant Nephrology, UC San Diego Medical Center and professor of medicine, UC San Diego School of Medicine.

The Transplant Team

UC San Diego Medical Center has a team of experienced physicians, nurses, transplant coordinators, social workers and pharmacists who specialize in long term care of the kidney transplant patient. This team of experts is dedicated to helping patients understand their condition, how to care for it and why compliance is so important.

Linda Awdishu, Pharm.D., and Ashley Feist, Pharm.D., senior transplant pharmacists, and Ilene Gustafson, R.N. and Heidi Pfander, R.N., transplant nurse specialists, and Chris Frederici, C.S.W., transplant social worker, are indispensable members of the team. "Therapy is individualized according to patient needs and preferences," explained Alexander Aussi, Transplant Administrator. "Often after the physician visit is concluded, these team

members will spend equally as much time with the patient, answering questions and checking on medication compliance to ensure patients understand their complex medical regimen after transplant." "A patient's ability to take medications reliably on a long term schedule, finances, and problems with side effects of medications must be considered in designing effective long term treatment," explained Feist. "For example, in the clinic, steroids are used in low doses, and can be omitted according to patient preference, but these decisions must be made with all risks and benefits explained to the patient and with a monitoring strategy in place."

"We are actually one of the few programs in the world to do blood levels of steroids in our patients as part of our published research" says Steiner, who has also written a review on the importance of patient compliance to long-term transplant survival. UC San Diego researchers regularly share data at national transplant meetings on the effects of immuno-suppression on the body.

"We don't think we should settle for 5, 10 or even 15 years of transplant survival. We started the specialized long-term clinics to promote unlimited kidney transplant survival and the other health issues of the transplant patient. Most patients want to do the right thing, and what patients do day-to-day makes a huge difference, if they are given the right advice," said Steiner.

That kind of patient support is what makes Donna Melnychenko tackle the drive from Temecula. "And I'm so grateful that they were there for me. I'm still being seen, I'm still being followed up. I still have these wonderful doctors that are there to make sure I can keep this kidney. They keep up to date on all the latest medicines, they make sure I'm taking the right things, and you know, you have to take things your whole life to make sure you keep the kidney, and that's what they do for me."

Khanna added, "Our patients place their trust in our cutting-edge research and care. That is something we take seriously and it is something to be celebrated."

In celebration, the Center for Transplantation at UC San Diego Medical Center is planning an appreciation party for patients, families and healthcare team members, Saturday, November 1, 2008, from 2 to 6 P.M., at the Ida and Cecil Green Faculty Club on the UC San Diego Campus, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093.

In 2005, 2006 and 2007 the UCSD Medical Center received the Medal of Honor from the Department of Health and Human Services, rating consistently above 75 percent in organ donation. UCSD Medical Center is one of only 108 hospitals nationwide who have achieved this distinction.

For more information on Kidney Transplantation or Transplantation Services at UC San Diego Medical Center, please visit: <http://health.ucsd.edu/specialties/transplant>

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