

UCSD Medical Center Announces Plans To Explore Heart Transplant Collaboration

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UCSD Medical Center has announced plans to pursue discussions with Sharp Memorial Hospital toward a potential collaboration in heart transplantation.

The number of heart transplants being performed across the nation is declining due to improvements in the treatment of patients with heart failure. UCSD Medical Center has seen its volumes decline, and consequently has been evaluating options for the future, including restructuring its program.

“The quality of our heart transplant program is very good, but our heart transplant volumes are lower than we would like,” said Richard Liekweg, Chief Executive Officer of UCSD Medical Center. “In addition to considering how to reorganize and restructure our program in order to continue serving our patients with a full range of treatment options, we have also begun discussions with our colleagues at Sharp about working together. If we can combine our expertise and resources, the people of San Diego will benefit.”

According to Dan Gross, Executive Vice President of Sharp HealthCare Hospital Operations, Sharp Memorial and its cardiac transplant physicians are looking forward to continuing the dialogue with UCSD Medical Center to explore how the programs would integrate to best meet the needs of local transplant patients.

“As we begin these discussions, we believe the right course of action at this time is to put our program on hold,” Liekweg said. UCSD Medical Center has notified UNOS (the United Network for Organ Sharing, which coordinates U.S. organ transplant activities) that it will stop doing heart transplants for up to 12 months. UCSD’s decision to voluntarily inactivate its heart transplant program will not impact its lung, heart-lung, kidney or liver transplant programs.

Liekweg emphasized UCSD Medical Center’s commitment to providing a full range of leading edge cardiovascular services for patients, and to advancing the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of heart disease and heart failure through research and clinical trials. These advances are the reason patients are surviving longer with heart disease, he noted.

UCSD's multidisciplinary Advanced Heart Failure Treatment Program is dedicated to providing the most beneficial, state-of-the-art medical care for patients with advanced heart failure, including transplant candidates and patients who have received a new organ.

The UCSD Medical Center heart transplant program, established by acclaimed cardiothoracic surgeon and transplant pioneer Stuart Jamieson, M.B., F.R.C.S., performed its first transplant 1990. At the end of 2006 the program had performed a total of 179 transplants, at its busiest performing up to 17 transplants a year. In 2006, the transplant team performed four heart transplants, all successful.

The UCSD Cardiothoracic Surgery team has a long history of quality care and service in a full range of cardiovascular interventions, not only heart, lung, and heart-lung transplantation, but in other complex surgeries that are not widely performed, such as pulmonary thromboendarterectomy (PTE) to remove deadly clots from the lungs.

There are currently two active patients and four inactive patients on UCSD's heart transplant waiting list. The active patients are not in imminent need of a transplant, based on their current health status. UCSD has notified these patients and will work with them to transition to another transplant center, including Sharp Memorial Hospital in San Diego.

UCSD has two patients listed for heart-lung transplant. Because UCSD's busy lung transplant program remains active, UCSD Medical Center will continue to treat these patients as multiple-organ candidates who will remain on the heart-lung list.

Sharp Memorial Hospital's Cardiothoracic and Vascular Institute has performed more than 270 heart transplants since the program began in 1985.

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