



“Don’t take your organs to Heaven. Heaven knows we need them here.”

Stories from the Field

**Eugenia Steffens, RN
Director of Transplant Services**

Created in 2020 during the pandemic, the Tree of Life honors those who have received a kidney transplant (dark green leaves) and those who have donated a kidney (light green leaves). Combined, there are 4200 leaves to date.

I’ve spent the vast majority of my nursing career in kidney transplant. I joined Hennepin Healthcare in 1991 as a Transplant Coordinator. There are a variety of roles you can serve as a nurse in this field. You can focus on the pre-transplant efforts: confirming the ability of a patient to receive a transplant, providing education on the process, and monitoring their health while they are on the waiting list. Then there are the nurses who bridge the inpatient and outpatient process. They work with patients once they receive a transplant, prepare them for life with a new kidney, and bridge them to the outpatient setting. Finally, the post-transplant nurses follow the patient after discharge and for the rest of their kidney’s life.

On-call Coordinators have the honor of calling a patient when a kidney is available and actually follow the kidney and donor into the operating room. We also employ a Living Donor Coordinator who works with people who would like to donate their kidneys. She works with them through the whole process and ensures separation from the individual receiving the donated kidney.

In all cases, you really built a long-term relationship with the transplant patient and their family members. It’s truly the most rewarding part of the work and why we stay in this profession for decades.

There have been a lot of enhancements over the years. New medications have drastically reduced the number of infections and deaths from those infections, and there are faster recovery times for both the recipient of a kidney and a living donor. I decided a few years ago to donate my kidney to a relative. That fell through, but my desire did not. My kidney donation ended up being part of a chain reaction. My kidney went to a patient at the U of M, and then there was an organ donor there who benefitted a patient at Hennepin Healthcare.

I received really great care and recovered quickly. The only sign I ever feel or see of my donation is a few small scars. I don’t miss my second kidney. There is a saying I like to share, **“Don’t take your organs to Heaven. Heaven knows we need them here”**.

In addition to the nurses, a big multidisciplinary team makes these miracles happen, from the pharmacists, surgeons, nephrologists, dietitians, social workers, to the folks in finance. I’m honored to be a part of this department and a part of so many lives now renewed through the generosity of others.

60 Kidney transplants occur on average each year. 25% of kidney transplants are from living donors. There are over 300 people on the kidney waiting list. The Kidney Transplant Program at Hennepin Healthcare is currently monitoring 850 patients who have had a transplant.