Why are living donors needed?
On average, 18 people die each day while waiting for a life-saving transplant that can’t take place because of the shortage of donated organs.
More than 100,000 kidney transplant candidates in the United States are awaiting an organ donor to become available. For many, the wait can be long and full of uncertainty, anxiety and continued illness.

Right here in our community, people come to the Allegheny Health Network Transplant Institute every day looking for hope that a kidney transplant will give them a better life – even save their life. But that can only become a reality through the generous donations of organ donors.

Most kidneys for transplant come from deceased donors. However, there aren’t enough of these organs for everyone who needs one, leaving some patients on the organ candidate waiting list for more than five years. It is estimated that 18 people die each day while waiting for a lifesaving transplant that can’t take place because of the shortage of donated organs.

This is why the need for living donor kidneys is so vital. Each year, more than 6,000 transplants are made possible by living donors – family, friends and even anonymous altruistic individuals. It is because of this extraordinary sentiment of giving that the Allegheny Health Network Living Donor Kidney Program can continue to give hope to many transplant patients.

We are a nationally renowned program that has been providing transplant patients for decades with specialized, innovative and compassionate care, resulting in the best possible outcomes for our patients. Our surgeons are among the finest kidney and pancreas transplant specialists in the country, and we utilize advanced techniques and technology in all aspects of patient care.

Our dedicated living donor team focuses solely on transplant patients, donors and their families. They ensure the health, safety and recovery of each living donor so the donor can quickly return to a full and active life after surgery.

At the Transplant Institute, we are committed to providing people with the hope that their lives and health will be better after a kidney transplant. We can help to accomplish this through a vibrant and effective living donor program and the many people who so selflessly provide lifesaving donations.

They need you.
For hope. For life.
2. LIVING DONOR KIDNEY PROGRAM

Sherri Kearns
Retired nurse
Altruistic kidney donor

Sharon Kallner
Officer manager
Kidney transplant recipient, October 2013
A selfless act
Saving a stranger’s life

Sherri Kearns knew she wanted to do something special after she retired from her nursing career.

It wasn’t to take a trip to Europe, or learn how to paint, or move to Florida with other retirees. Sherri decided she wanted to give a piece of herself to others. Literally.

As a nurse at Jefferson Hospital for almost 20 years, the Pleasant Hills native saw firsthand the toll that kidney failure and dialysis takes on patients’ bodies, daily schedules and overall quality of life. So her something special was to become a living donor and donate one of her kidneys.

“All of my nursing career, I saw people on dialysis, and it’s heartbreaking to watch them commit to that therapy three days a week and still not have great health or strength; they’re just getting by,” said the 63-year-old mother of two and grandmother of five. “I made a promise to God that if I were healthy when I retired, I would donate a kidney.”

Sherri retired in August 2013. A few weeks later, she was reading a weekly edition of the Pittsburgh Catholic, where she saw an article about organ donation with a phone number for Allegheny Health Network Living Donor Program. She called immediately to schedule an appointment and begin testing.

“I kept this very quiet because I wanted to do this with great humility. This was between God and me. I didn’t tell my kids until a month before surgery, and my husband – after 44 years of marriage – knew better than to argue with me,” Sherri joked.

“People thought I was crazy to do this, but it’s such an easy thing to do for someone, to save a life.”

Then in October, a week before surgery, Sherri inadvertently met her kidney recipient in the blood lab at Allegheny General Hospital. She heard another woman telling the blood technician that she was having a kidney transplant the following week.

“My ears perked up, and I knew this had to be the person that would receive my kidney,” Sherri excitedly explained. “I went and introduced myself and told her that I think I was giving her my kidney. The rest is history.”

Sharon Kallner, 56, was indeed the recipient. The married mother of two grown sons has polycystic kidney disease, a condition she genetically inherited. Her brother had a successful kidney transplant three years ago, and her sister is in the early stages of the disease.

Three days a week for two years, Sharon would leave her house in Sarver, Pa., at 5 a.m. to have dialysis. She would begin the treatment so early so that she could still get to her job as an office manager of a trucking company.

“It was just the fatigue that would get to me, but I knew I needed to plow through,” said Sharon, who had been on the transplant list for three and a half years before finding out that she was a match with an altruistic living donor, who ended up to be Sherri.

The transplant surgery last October went extremely well for both women. Sharon went home four days later and began working full time again in January. “I feel like I have a completely normal life now. It’s just unbelievable, really, and I got to see both of my sons get married in the last year.”

For Sherri, she describes the organ donation process as relatively painless, explaining how she was walking around an hour after the kidney donation when she went to visit Sharon in her room.

“I had some discomfort and occasional pain for about a week, but I got my staples removed 10 days after surgery and drove straight to Walmart,” Sherri said.

Six months after the transplant, the two had the opportunity to see each other again at a Donor Pinning Ceremony at Allegheny General. Sherri and Sharon laughed and talked at the annual lunch that celebrates living donors from the previous year.

“Sharon looks absolutely fabulous,” Sherri said with great joy.

Sharon responded by saying, “I’m going to Las Vegas thanks to you.”

She went on to say, “It’s amazing to see what people will do for other people, even people they don’t know. Sherri gave me my life.”

Sherri continued to view her kidney donation with humility and said, “I don’t notice one difference in my body at all. I think God gave us two kidneys so we could give one away.”
A remarkable gift of generosity

Donating a kidney is a serious decision. Your consideration process should include ample information-gathering and consultations with experts. The Allegheny Health Network Living Donor Kidney Program has an experienced team of health-care professionals, dedicated to working with potential donors during their decision-making and eligibility process. It is important that donors fully understand how donating a kidney will affect them and their families and how drastically it can improve – and even save – another person’s life.
Facts about living organ donation

Who can be a living donor?
Living donors should be in good overall physical and mental health and 18 years or older. Some medical conditions could prevent you from being a living donor, including diabetes, cancer, HIV, hepatitis and pregnancy. Some donor health conditions could harm a transplant recipient so it is important that you share all information about your physical and mental health during the evaluation process.

What are the types of living donor transplants?
In a directed donation, the donor names the specific person to receive the kidney. This is the most common type of living donation. The donor may be:

- A relative, such as a parent, brother, sister or adult child
- An unrelated person who has a personal or social connection with the transplant candidate, such as a spouse or significant other, a friend or a coworker
- An unrelated person who has heard about the transplant candidate’s need

In a non-directed or altruistic donation, the donor does not name the specific person to receive the kidney. The match is arranged based on medical compatibility with a patient in need.

Some non-directed donors choose never to meet their recipient. In other cases, the donor and recipient may meet at some point, if they both agree.

What is a paired donation or paired exchange?
Paired kidney exchanges have become a way for transplant candidates to receive a kidney, even if their willing living donor is not a good match for donating to them. It involves two pairs of living kidney donors and transplant candidates who do not have matching blood types. The two candidates “trade” donors so that each candidate receives a kidney from a donor with a compatible blood type. Multiple pairs can even be matched with divided pairs in a chain that starts with an altruistic kidney donation.

The Allegheny Health Network Transplant Institute is a member of a multi-paired kidney donation chain, organized by the National Kidney Registry and coordinated locally by the Center for Organ Recovery and Education (CORE).

How do I start the living donor process or find out more information?
If you are interested or know someone you would like to help through living donation, contact the Allegheny Health Network Living Donor Kidney Program at 412.359.4441.

For answers to more of your questions, visit www.AHN.org.
Jess Checca would sadly watch her father slumped down into their living room chair four hours a day, three times a week, vacantly staring at the television while attached to a hemodialysis machine. Though there was sunshine outside of the Checca’s Derry Township home there wasn’t much brightness inside.

“This was a guy who had so much energy, worked hard, rode a motorcycle and constantly ran calls as an EMT,” Jess sullenly said while recalling her dad’s condition. “His health was getting so bad, and he was so weak; he couldn’t even walk. It just wasn’t my dad.”

Since he was 16, Alan has been dealing with kidney failure from glomerulonephritis, an inflammation of the kidneys’ filters. Sometimes the disease is caused by an illness or infection, while other times it’s a hereditary condition. In Alan’s case, the cause is not known, but it’s a disease that has significantly affected his entire adult life.

Now 47, Alan has had two kidney transplants from non-living donors – the first lasted 12 years and the second started to fail after 10. As long as she can remember, Jess said her father remained his spirited self through it all, continuing to work several jobs and enjoying life the best he could.

But Alan had to be placed on the transplant list for a third time, where he remained for five years while on dialysis. His wife of 26 years, Kristin, was evaluated to determine if she was a suitable donor, as did their son, Johnathon, now 24, but neither was compatible. Jess was only 15 then, so she wasn’t tested.

In the last few months of that fifth year, Alan’s health declined rapidly. Jess remembers her dad feeling deflated and defeated at that point. “I couldn’t watch anything else happen to him,” she said.

Shortly after Jess’ 20th birthday, she decided to call Allegheny Health Network and have the transplant team test her for donor kidney eligibility.

“I didn’t look into it when I was 18 because I’m on the small side, and I wanted to make sure I was strong and healthy enough,” Jess said. “So when I turned 20, I felt ready, and I found out I was a match. It was a pretty easy decision for me. I really wanted to do it and help my dad get out of that condition.”

She explained how the transplant team – physicians, nurses, a transplant coordinator and a patient advocate – guided her through the decision process. “They made sure that I was prepared and that it was what I really wanted to do.”

To say the least, Alan said, he was shocked when his daughter told him that she had been screened and was an eligible donor.

“My daughter took it upon herself to be tested, doing it all on her own without telling me. As a father, you want to protect your children and not have any harm come to them, so I was reluctant to have her do it,” Alan said while glancing proudly over at his daughter. “But after talking with the transplant professionals and family and friends, I realized she was giving me an incredible gift. I can honestly say that I probably wouldn’t be here today if she had not done this for me.”

The Checcas both described their April 2013 surgeries as successful and life-changing events. Jess returned to work as a nursing assistant six weeks after surgery, and her six-month checkup showed that she is in excellent health.

“The staff took such good care of me during surgery, staying by my side through all of it,” Jess said. “I had a nurse rubbing my hand before I went into surgery and the same nurse holding my hand when I woke up. And now, here we are, with my dad practically back to normal.”

Alan has been doing very well since his third transplant. Now without the shackles of dialysis, he is back to living an active life. He’s a school police officer for the Derry Area School District and hopes to return to the sign making industry soon, a job that he has loved for 20 years. Alan serves on the Derry Borough Council and belongs to the Westmoreland Council Animal Response Team, which addresses animal-related needs after a natural disaster. With such a love for animals, he is also taking courses to become a K9 medic.

“Our community was such a tremendous help to me and my family through the transplant process,” Alan said. “I want to always try to reach out and give back. I can’t answer ambulance and fire calls anymore as an EMT, so I’ve shifted gears to find new ways to help.”

From nearby, Jess listened and smiled at her dad, who donned a leather jacket and exuded both inner and outer strength that she had not seen in such a long time.

“I’m just so glad I did it,” she said, “and grateful that I could.”
Jess Checca
Certified nursing assistant
Living kidney donor for her father

Alan Checca
Sign maker, School police officer, Former EMT
Kidney failure from glomerulonephritis
Third kidney transplant, April 2013
Exceptional donation program,
focused on you

Our Living Donor Kidney Program team focuses exclusively on our donors, transplant patients and their caregivers and support team. The program’s highlights include:

• For the past three years, we received the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Award for achieving an exceptional consent rate of 93 percent for prospective living donor candidates.

• Our surgeons offer minimally invasive surgical options to living kidney donors, including advanced robotic surgery. This procedure – called a laparoscopic nephrectomy – requires only four small incisions. We are the only transplant center in Pittsburgh, and one of just a few in the country, to perform this innovative procedure.

• We provide a specialized team that safeguards the wellbeing and recovery of each living donor.

• We are a member of a multi-paired kidney donation chain that is organized by the National Kidney Registry and coordinated locally by the Center for Organ Recovery and Education (CORE).

• We work closely with the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), a private non-profit organization that operates the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) under contract with the federal government.
For the past three years, we received the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Award for achieving an exceptional consent rate of 93 percent for prospective living donor candidates.
The Allegheny Health Network Transplant Institute’s patient survival rate is above the national average and **among the best in the country.**

— The Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR)
The Allegheny Health Network Transplant Institute's patients have experienced survival rates that are among the best in the country. And we continually remain at the forefront of advanced treatment options and techniques through our research endeavors and discoveries.

Since 1987, we have been innovators in solid organ transplants and continue to provide each patient with the finest expertise, leading-edge capabilities and medicine, and dedicated attention. Through a collaborative approach to care, our transplant doctors, nurses, social workers, transplant coordinators and comprehensive health-care team are able to meet a patient’s every need and ensure that each patient receives exceptional care.

The transplant team works closely with patients so they understand all aspects of the transplant process and feel comfortable and secure. We also communicate regularly with patients’ primary care physicians to make certain that every health-care professional involved in a patient’s case is well-informed before, during and after surgery.

We understand how overwhelmed patients and their families feel after being told they have end-stage organ disease. This is why, day in and day out, our staff works as a team to provide patients with extensive support and resources to ease the burden of a transplant.

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**Allegheny Health Network Kidney Transplant Program**

- **Patient survival rate is among the best in the country** for live-donor kidney and deceased-donor kidney, according to data from The Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR)

- **Approved** by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), Medicare and Medicaid

- **Multidisciplinary team approach** that ensures all-encompassing care and treatment

- **Extensive research endeavors** and clinical trials available to our patients for continually evolving treatment options

- **Personalized treatment plans** for each transplant patient and high-quality, compassionate, patient-focused care
Allegheny Health Network Living Kidney Donor Program Team

**Surgeons**

Ngoc Thai, MD, PhD
Director, Transplant Institute

Akhtar Khan, MD

Peter Abrams, MD

Marc Gignac, MD

Kusum Tom, MD

**Nephrologists**

Bhavna Chopra, MD

Tina Ko, MD

**Living donor advocate**

Eileen Pistelli, RN

**Living donor coordinators**

Holly Chapman, RN

Janice Glidewell, RN
Allegheny Health Network

For more than a century, the hospitals of Allegheny Health Network have been dedicated to providing exceptional patient care. Today, we continue this tradition by using the latest medical innovations to treat our patients. Gaining knowledge through research to constantly improve the care we deliver. And staffing our hospitals with experienced, expert and compassionate physicians, nurses and other health-care professionals who are dedicated to medicine, people and healing.

We provide patients with the right care, at the right place, at the right time. This means that we work as a team to coordinate patients’ care from start to finish. We ensure that each patient receives exceptional, advanced health services that result in the best possible outcome. And we offer easy access to care through our seven hospitals: Allegheny General, Allegheny Valley, Canonsburg, Forbes, Jefferson, Saint Vincent and West Penn; and also at 200 primary- and specialty-care practices that dot the tri-state area’s landscape.

Our physicians continually explore and develop new treatments that allow us to bring medical discoveries from the laboratory directly to our patients. These breakthroughs help to save lives and give our patients access to some of the most progressive approaches to medicine. Serving as a clinical campus for both Temple University School of Medicine and Drexel University College of Medicine, the network’s extensive fellowship and residency programs train the next generation of doctors.

With approximately 17,000 employees and more than 2,100 physicians, Allegheny Health Network’s distinguished medical programs have been recognized and accredited regionally and nationally. We have been named one of the country’s best health-care providers by U.S. News and World Report and have received accolades from numerous organizations, including Thomson Reuters, AARP, Healthgrades and Consumer Reports.

Contact us
Allegheny Health Network
Transplant Institute
Living Kidney Donor Program
412.359.4441
1.844.4DONORS
AHN.org

Other helpful contacts
National Kidney Registry
www.kidneyregistry.org

Center for Organ Recovery and Education (CORE)
800.DONORS.7
www.core.org

United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS)
1.888.894.6361
www.transplantliving.org