

Close-ups

A Patient's Perspective

My Kidney Donation: Unexpected Twists

Some years ago, a close family friend told me his chronic kidney disease had progressed and he would need a new kidney to avoid dialysis. I volunteered to donate my kidney, and as it turned out, I was a near perfect match. But, our celebration did not last long. While I was being worked up for surgery, the transplant team found some ureteral abnormalities that made me ineligible for the donation.

A few years later, I began experiencing flank pain, which was bad enough to send me to the emergency room. I was told my right kidney was no longer functional and would have to be removed. The surgery went smoothly. It was hard to believe that a nephrectomy could seem like minor surgery (although admittedly, recovery was slow).

Still, this was not the outcome I had hoped for: instead of losing my kidney to give life, my surgery brought me face-to-face with my own mortality. Fortunately, I am now in good health. I am working again and have rejoined my running group. To our great joy, my friend finally reached the top of the transplant list and is doing beautifully with his new kidney.—M.K.



Commentary

M.K.'s story brings to mind Johanna Shapiro's definition of empathy: an engaged act in which "the physician must draw closer to the patient, putting the interests of others above those of self, even at some sacrifice to oneself." M.K., a physician herself, is one of those people for whom altruism is a natural way of life. She inspires us to reenvision the reach of relationship-centered care, while reminding us that even when things do not turn out as we intend, we are all connected in unexpected ways.

Caroline Wellbery, MD

Resources

National Kidney Foundation: <https://www.kidney.org/transplantation/beatdonor>

Reese PP, Allen MB, Carney C, et al. Outcomes for individuals turned down for living kidney donation. *Clin Transplant*. 2018; 32(12):e13408.

Tong A, Chapman JR, Wong G, Kanellis J, McCarthy G, Craig JC. The motivations and experiences of living kidney donors: a thematic synthesis. *Am J Kidney Dis*. 2012;60(1):15-26. ■

The editors of *AFP* welcome submissions for Close-ups. Guidelines for contributing to this feature can be found in the Authors' Guide at <https://www.aafp.org/afp/authors>.

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