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## UAH surgical team breaks Alberta's transplant record

EDMONTON – Local surgeons have again broken Alberta's transplant record, performing more transplants in a 10-day period than they normally do in a month.

The transplant services team at the University of Alberta Hospital (UAH) performed 32 organ transplants between July 18 and 27: three lung, four heart, eight liver, five islet, one whole pancreas, one kidney/pancreas and 10 kidney transplants. Surgeons at the Alberta Health Services (AHS) facility typically perform between 20 and 25 organ transplants per month.

The previous 10-day record was 30 organs transplanted, set nine months ago.

"This is truly a remarkable record and achievement," says Dr. Jim Kutsogiannis, Medical Director of the Human Organ Procurement Exchange (HOPE) Program. "These transplants were made possible through the collaborative efforts of our regional ICU staff, HOPE and Comprehensive Tissue Center (CTC) coordinators, operating room staff, and transplant surgeons."

The procedures were performed by a team of six organ transplant surgeons: three thoracic (lungs/heart) surgeons, one kidney surgeon, and two hepatobiliary (liver, pancreas, and islet) surgeons. When a suitable donor becomes available, staff, physicians and surgeons work quickly to match organs to recipients, schedule operating rooms, and find specialized post-operative beds. Surgical teams must be ready to perform transplants on short notice.

The 32 organs came from 11 deceased donors, eight of whom were from Alberta.

"Without the generosity of spirit and empathy of our many Alberta donors and their families, we could not have offered our recipients the opportunity for ongoing quality of life," says Dr. Kutsogiannis. "The need for organs is constant and, despite breaking two transplant records in one year, Albertans continue to die on the transplant list due to a shortage of available organs."

More than 200 Albertans in the Edmonton area died while awaiting transplant over the past five years.

Rick Galloway, 54, had been waiting for a lung transplant since February. Diagnosed with pulmonary veno-occlusive disease – a rare disease characterized by the narrowing of the pulmonary veins – Galloway had spent over 50 days in the cardiovascular intensive care unit at the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute in critical condition waiting for a suitable donor.

He was one of the patients who received a transplant during the record 10-day period.

"I collapsed in May and the doctors told me I wouldn't survive the week on my own, so they surgically implanted a device to help ventilate my lungs," Galloway says. "My care team kept me alive until an organ became available.

"I am forever grateful to my donor and their family."

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As a critical care physician on the neurological intensive care unit, Dr. Kutsogiannis sees first-hand how difficult it is for families to deal with the diagnosis of brain death and discussing discontinuation of care.

“Having directions about what a loved one would like to see done in the event of their death can help with their grieving process,” says Dr. Kutsogiannis. “I would encourage all Albertans and their families to discuss the gift of organ and tissue donation and to register their wishes to donate organs and tissues online or in person at Alberta registry agents.”

Alberta currently has one of the lowest organ and tissue donor rates in the country. In April, the Alberta government launched an online organ and tissue donation registry, giving Albertans a way to record their wishes to donate organs and/or tissues after death. Albertans can also document their desire to donate organs and/or tissues at their local registry agent when they go to renew their driver’s licence or other identification.

Since then, more than 23,000 Albertans have legally registered to affirm their wishes to donate their organs and/or tissues.

One deceased organ donor could provide a life-saving treatment for seven people by donating lungs, heart, liver, two kidneys, pancreas and small bowel. Only one to two per cent of deaths lead to organ donation; however, one deceased tissue donor can enhance up to 80 lives by donating corneas, sclera, heart valves, skin, bone, tendons or amniotic tissue.

All organ transplants in AHS Edmonton Zone are performed at UAH/Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute and Stollery Children’s Hospital.

The University Hospital Foundation has supported the transplant program since the program first pioneered transplants at the University of Alberta Hospital in 1967. Community donors have given more than \$5 million to advance transplant patient care and research.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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