TRANSPLANTATION

Anonymous living liver donors—outcomes and motivations

“Anonymous living donors are a reasonable source for donor livers for transplantation,” says Trevor Reichman after conducting research into the outcomes of anonymous liver donors.

In 2004, a middle-aged man approached the Toronto General Hospital wanting to anonymously donate a portion of his liver. After an extensive assessment process—which included multiple psychiatric assessments—the health-care team concluded that his rationale for donation was sound. “Since this first case, several public appeals in Ontario have raised awareness about transplantation and the potential benefits of anonymous donation,” explains Reichman. He goes on, “This has resulted in large numbers of individuals coming forward offering to donate, with now 14 individuals successfully donating pieces of their liver to date. The focus of our research was not only to evaluate the safety and morbidity of anonymous live liver donation but also to try to begin

to understand the motivation behind anonymous donation, and to communicate the good outcomes that can be achieved.”

The researchers assessed the outcomes of 29 consecutive anonymous liver donors. Patients were assessed using the standard living donor liver assessment process in combination with additional criteria, including: a logical rationale for donation, a history of social altruism, a strong social support network and a willingness to maintain confidentiality. 12 donors were ultimately accepted—six men and six women, aged between 20 and 54 years, and from all walks of life. All donors shared a desire to help others.

Five patients donated their left lateral segment to a pediatric recipient and seven underwent a right hepatectomy for an adult recipient. The overall complication rate for the donors was 40%. All donors are currently well and none expressed a regret about their decision to donate; notably, one donor went on to also donate a kidney.

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The researchers conclude that anonymous liver donation increases the donor pool.

“We are developing and validating standardized tools to better evaluate these unique donors,” says Reichman. “We also need to follow these patients for a longer period of time to ensure that their self-reported satisfaction with donation is durable over time.”

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