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# 5 receive kidneys in first-ever multiple transplant

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BALTIMORE (AP) — Five people received new kidneys from strangers in a domino-effect series of transplant operations on a single day, setting a record for the number of kidney transplants involved in such a swap, hospital officials said Monday.

Each kidney patient was unrelated to the donor he received the kidney from and the donor-recipient pairs did not meet before the Nov. 14 operations. They were to gather for the first time Monday at the Johns Hopkins Comprehensive Transplant Center in Baltimore.

Several triple transplants have previously been performed at the Johns Hopkins Comprehensive Transplant Center in Baltimore, but hospital officials say the five simultaneous transplants performed Tuesday are a first.

The operations involved six operating rooms, twelve surgeons, 11 anesthesiologists, and 18 nurses, hospital officials said. The donor surgeries began at 7:15 a.m. and were finished at 11 a.m. The transplant procedures began at 1 p.m. and were finished at 5:15 a.m.

The donors and recipients came from Ontario, West Virginia, Florida, Maine, and Maryland, officials said.

The five recipients included four who approached Johns Hopkins separately with relatives who were willing, but incompatible donors. The fifth had been on a waiting list for a kidney from a deceased donor, said Eric Vohr, a Johns Hopkins spokesman.

The fifth donor was a so-called "altruistic donor" — someone who was not related to and did not know any of the five people in need of a kidney, Vohr said.

Dr. Robert Montgomery, director of Hopkins' transplant center and head of the transplant team, called Monday for a national kidney-swap program, saying it could help ease the nation's shortage of transplant organs and cut costs by getting people off dialysis.

Most kidney transplants use organs taken from cadavers. But doctors prefer using organs from live donors, because the success rates are higher.

In a live-donor practice used increasingly in the U.S. over the past few years, a patient who needs a kidney is matched up with a compatible stranger; in return, the patient must line up a friend or relative willing to donate an organ to a stranger, too.

The practice is particularly useful in cases where a kidney patient's friends or relatives are willing to donate an organ to their loved one but are not a suitable match.

Montgomery noted however that live donor kidney swaps present ethical problems for some institutions since the National Organ Transplant Act prohibits any consideration of items which are valuable being received in exchange for a donation. Some institutions feel multiple arrangements come uncomfortably close to quid pro quo, Montgomery said, calling for a clarification of the law.

"If you had a national program, you wouldn't have to do five transplants at one hospital, they could be done separately," and much more quickly, Montgomery said.

In August 2003, Johns Hopkins surgeons performed three simultaneous kidney transplants among three patients who had come to the hospital with willing, but incompatible donors.

And last year, Johns Hopkins doctors performed a triple transplant involving an altruistic donor who was willing to give his kidney to anyone who needed one. In that case, the altruistic donor was a member of a Christian religious group, many of whose members have donated kidneys to strangers.


Annie Moore, a spokeswoman for the United Network for Organ Sharing, the non-profit organization that coordinates U.S. organ transplants, said the quintuple transplant was the first of which her organization was

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aware. Triple transplants are the most that have been performed to date, and paired transplants are more common, Moore said.

Whether more large-scale transplants will be performed is unclear, she said.

"You have to have the right situation in place," Moore said. "Will we see another? We could see another five. I'm not sure, though."

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