

9 March 2020

Altruistic organ donation and the gift of life

Would you donate a kidney to a stranger?

That's exactly what John Mackie did last year when he donated one of his kidneys to someone he didn't know.

He is one of a small number of donors in New Zealand who have no relationship or knowledge of the potential recipient of their kidney.

Having worked as a cardiopulmonary medical technologist, John first came across the idea of organ donation after seeing a brochure during a routine GP visit.

He also saw the challenges dialysis patients faced during his time working as a medical deliveries driver.

"I felt that donating a kidney was something I could do to give back after being given a second chance following some challenges earlier in my life," he says.

John and his wife both decided to see if they were eligible to donate. After going through a series of assessments, John was cleared to be a donor and underwent surgery last year.

A few months after the operation, he received an anonymous card from the recipient of his kidney. He describes the feeling as being one of "anonymous satisfaction".

"It is a great feeling knowing I have transformed someone's life," he says.

Throughout the donation process, John says he was well supported by hospital staff. "Any concerns or questions I had were quickly answered. Everyone throughout the process was caring and they put me at the centre of everything they did."

Janak de Zoysa, Clinical Director of Renal, says kidney transplant is the best option for most patients.

"About 600 New Zealanders start renal replacement therapy each year – this is a life-saving intervention," he says. "A kidney transplant offers a better quality of life and prolongs a person's life compared with someone who needs dialysis."

New Zealand has historically had a low rate of organ donation compared to other countries. However, newly-established donor liaison roles across New Zealand and the establishment of the National Renal Transplant Service has resulted in an increase in the number of live

donor kidney transplants. Around half of all kidney transplants at Waitematā now come from live donors – typically 12-13 per year.

12 March 2020 is World Kidney Day. To celebrate the day, the Waitematā DHB renal team will be at Glenfield Mall and WestCity Waitakere offering the public free health and kidney check-ups.

About kidney donations in New Zealand:

- About 380 New Zealanders are on the national kidney transplant waiting list at one time.
- The average waiting time for a patient to receive a kidney donation in New Zealand is two and a half to three years.
- Last year, 220 kidneys were donated to New Zealanders in need.
- There are three main types of kidney donations - one is from a deceased person, another is from a willing and healthy family member who knows them, the third is from an anonymous live donor.

ENDS

For further information contact

Waitematā DHB media line: 09 487 1276

About Waitematā DHB

Waitematā DHB serves the largest population of any district health board in New Zealand, currently standing at more than 630,000 people. We have a workforce of more than 7,500 staff spread across more than 80 sites, including North Shore Hospital and Waitakere Hospital. We are also the Northern Region provider of forensic psychiatry and child disability services, plus the metro Auckland provider of child community dental services and community alcohol and drug services.