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Philly Preschooler Shares Liver with Rock and Roll Legend

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Singer Bobby Rydell Receives a Combined Liver and Kidney Transplant at Jefferson

Bobby Rydell, actor and hit singer from the 1950s and 60s recently underwent a combined liver and kidney transplant at Jefferson, smack dab in the middle of the “Wildwood Days” (1963) of summer.

The South Philadelphia native, known for such hits as “Volare” (1960), “Kissin’ Time” (1959), and “Wild One” (1960), still calls the city home. So, when he needed a lifesaving transplant, he came to Jefferson.

“Mr. Rydell did not have very long to live,” says Cataldo Doria, MD, PhD, FACS, the Nicoletti Family Professor of Transplant Surgery and director of the Division of Transplant Surgery at Jefferson.

Rydell’s kidney transplant.

Dr. Doria performed the liver transplant on the singer assisted by fellow transplant surgeon Carlo Ramirez, MD, FACS. The two surgeons then reversed their roles for Rydell’s kidney transplant.

The patient had been placed on the transplant waiting list in late spring.

The seriousness of his condition and the rarity of his situation – he needed simultaneous transplants of two organs – placed him close to the top of the list.

“I was at home eating breakfast when the call came from Jefferson that they had both organs,” recalls Rydell. “My wife and I packed up and headed to Jefferson immediately to prepare for surgery.”

In fact, Rydell was not the primary recipient of the liver, rather a child on the waiting list for a new liver at Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Delaware to assist with the pediatric patient.

In Rydell’s case he would get the larger portion of the liver and a kidney from the donor, with the smaller part of the donor liver – about 25 percent – going to the pediatric patient.

Warren Maley, MD, director of Jefferson’s Live Donor Liver Transplant Program traveled to the hospital where the deceased donor was to procure the organs. First he split the liver inside the donor’s body before removing the two parts.

Dr. Maley sent the larger portion of the liver and one kidney to Jefferson where Rydell waited in an operating room; he then accompanied the smaller portion of the liver to Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Delaware to assist with the pediatric transplant.

Back in Philadelphia Drs. Doria and Ramirez proceeded with Rydell’s double transplant.

The surgery was a great success. Rydell’s recovery continues to progress on schedule.

“We are thrilled with his results and hope that he will resume his normal life – including a return to the stage,” says Dr. Doria.

With his new lease on life, Rydell advocates for organ donation, telling KYW Newsradio it truly is “the gift of life”.

With the help of his team of transplant surgeons at Jefferson, this American icon of the early days of rock and roll still has “A Lot of Living to Do” (Bye Bye Birdie, 1963).

For more information about the Transplant Program at Jefferson visit: www.jeffersonhospital.org/transplant