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Philly Preschooler Shares Liver with Rock and Roll Legend

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Surgical Solutions

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.

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 was the call [see sidebar]. But because a liver can regenerate, surgeons can now perform so-called split-liver transplants, doubling the number of beneficiaries.

In Rydell’s case he would get the larger portion of the liver and a kidney from the



A vibrant Bobby Rydell reunites with his surgical team, Drs. Carlo Ramirez, Warren Maley and Cataldo Doria, 10 weeks after his double transplant in July.

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



Assiah Phinisee, age 4, with her transplant surgeon, Dr. Stephen Dunn.

Philly Preschooler Shares Liver with Rock and Roll Legend

The same liver that’s helping restore the health of rock and roll legend Bobby Rydell is also giving a little girl her first chance at a normal childhood.

Born in Philadelphia in May 2008, Assiah Phinisee spent the first four years of her life battling biliary atresia – a blockage of the ducts that carry bile from the liver to the gallbladder and intestines. By the time Assiah’s mother, Rasheena, visited Stephen P. Dunn, MD, Chair of the Department of Surgery at Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children and Professor of Surgery at Jefferson Medical College, in 2010, Assiah had undergone numerous surgeries and spent hundreds of days in the hospital.

At another area hospital in 2009, Assiah received her first transplant, a full liver from a toddler donor. Despite initial positive signs, that transplant ultimately failed. The team at duPont – with whom Jefferson partners to provide pediatric transplants – re-listed Assiah on the transplant waiting list in March 2011.

After waiting nearly a year and a half, Rasheena got the news that Assiah would receive a partial liver transplant in July. Since then, Rasheena says her daughter has never been healthier.

Read the full story at: www.jeffersonhospital.org/assiah

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