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The Surgeon Speaks-Carlo Ramirez, MD, FACS

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Transplantation from living donors offers the best outcomes for patients with chronic kidney disease. Unfortunately, only 60 percent of potential living donors are compatible with their intended recipients. Those patients without a compatible donor will have to wait on the deceased donor transplant list, which currently exceeds 85,000 patients nationally, with a median wait time of 4 years.

To facilitate living kidney donor exchanges, Jefferson has adopted a “paired-kidney donation” (or “kidney donor swap”) protocol, which will help patients with potential living donors who are incompatible for blood or tissue type. By collaborating with the Paired Donation Network, we hope to find a compatible donor-recipient pair that will make transplant possible for most of these recipients.

The surgery is identical to a standard living donor kidney transplant, but there are added considerations with a kidney exchange: the timing of the donor operations requires careful coordination to avoid an unfair exchange, where one donor donates while another potential donor does not, resulting in only one recipient getting a transplant.
Philadelphia is a competitive community for kidney transplantation, and Jefferson’s 2009 numbers were impressive. "31 kidney transplants, including pancreas transplant," says Associate Professor Carlo R. Ramirez, MD, FACS. "The percentages of deceased donors remain the same as the previous year." Berch Harris is a Jefferson patient who was fortunate to have a donor with whom he was a good match—his wife. Valerie Ahtermann was their match, and after the short waiting period, the Harris family received the renal transplant.

"We have been afforded this opportunity," says Dr. Ramirez. "It is fitting that Jefferson received this gift. This is where I trained and practiced my entire career. Mrs. Pilmes, a longtime patient, was recognized at the event for her tremendous generosity as a Platinum Sponsor. Dr. Cohn, who is currently practicing my entire career. Mrs. Pilmes learned of the Gala, over many years and many alumni, faculty and friends who contributed $600,000 for Jefferson. Among the most notable was Dr. Barbara Cohn, MD, FACS, the Department of Surgery faculty, who was presented to Thomas Jefferson University.

Those Who Give

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