

Feature

New kidney gives Missouri man a new lease on life

“It’s the difference between life and death.” That’s how Tyronne Allen described his health after receiving a donor kidney. And the giant of a man who runs the Missouri State Supreme Court Library is happy someone decided to give him the chance to see that difference.

In a deep, rich baritone that belies his gentle nature, Allen recalled what his life was like before he received his donor kidney--a life battling diabetes for 35 years. He said the disease took its toll on his kidneys to the point they failed, and he had to undergo dialysis treatments.

Allen was like many other African-Americans, who, along with Asian-Pacific Islanders and Hispanics, suffer disproportionately from end-stage renal disease (lack of kidney function) compared to Caucasians. In fact, while minorities make up only about 20 percent of the U.S. population, they comprise more than half of the people on the national organ transplant waiting list. The chances of an organ transplant being successful are greatly improved if organs are matched between people of the same race or ethnic background, making it all the more important to get more minorities to sign up to be organ donors.

“When you start receiving treatments at the dialysis clinic, they ask you to sign up to receive a donor kidney,” said Allen. He took that advice, conferred with a transplant center and immediately went on the waiting list. Like every organ donor recipient, Allen had to have just the right match, even though many of his friends and family gladly offered their kidneys to help him.

“I had several people offer me kidneys—my wife, family members and even deacons at my church,” Allen said. But none of those people were quite right. It’s a common problem for those waiting on the organ donation list: plenty of offers but few matches. So as he waited the three years it took to find the right match, Allen continued his dialysis.

“Don’t get me wrong. Dialysis is a wonderful tool that helped keep me alive,” said Allen. “But it is exhausting.” Allen described how he would go to the dialysis center for four-hour sessions, three times a week. These treatments were in addition to the busy schedule he kept at the office. He said there were many days when he wouldn’t finish up dialysis until nearly 8 p.m., leaving him just enough time to go home, rest a little from the tiring dialysis process, eat supper and get ready to face another busy day, another day of waiting and hoping for a donor kidney.

Allen had to be ready to go to the hospital at a moment’s notice. “There were times when I would get a call at two in the morning when it was icy outside telling me that there was a possible match.” He admitted that even for a giant of a man such as himself, it was a scary process. Finally, after three years, Allen got the call.

“It was on Easter Sunday that I received my new kidney,” said Allen. “That’s a special blessing, and I think God was really good to me for that.”

Allen said the new kidney he received five years ago has given him a new lease on life. “I feel great!” he said as a warm smile crossed his face. “There’s no more dialysis treatments, I can travel, but most importantly, I feel so much healthier!”

Allen also pointed out that he has remained faithful to his anti-rejection medications, needed to help his body accept his new kidney.

“I remember the nurse saying to me, ‘I don’t want to see you back here, Tyronne, because the reason most people come back to the hospital is they don’t take their medicine,’ and I’ve never forgotten that.”

Now, Allen wants to see more people sign up for the organ and tissue donor registry so others might also get their own new lease on life. Though the names of 1,200 Missourians are on the organ donor transplant waiting list and more than 2.4 million have signed up to be donors, Allen’s difficulty in finding a match underscores the need for more people to sign up. More donors give doctors the largest possible pool from which to choose.

August 1, 2008, is Minority Donor Awareness Day, and Allen is hoping more people, especially African-Americans and other minorities, will consider becoming organ donors.

“I know there are not enough donors out there, and I hope a lot of people will donate their kidneys, because it really changes the quality of life for the recipient,” he said.

Allen added that it is even more important that people consider donating after their death. “When you die, you can’t use it anyway. It would be nice to give to someone who needs it.” He said if he could be on the organ donation list, he would, because if someone had not done that for him, he would have never received the gift he did--his new life.

“I hope that people will consider that it would be a gift, and you would be well-blessed if you do.”

To see and hear Allen tell his own story, click [here](#).

For more information, go to one of these web sites:

Missouri Organ Donor Program: www.missouriorgandonor.com

United Network for Organ Sharing: www.unos.org

National Kidney Foundation: www.kidney.org

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services Organ/Tissue Donation and Registry:
<http://www.dhss.mo.gov/OrganDonor/>