KPD: Saving More Lives
OSF HealthCare Newsroom
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March 14 is World Kidney Day, which aims to raise awareness of the increasing incidents of kidney disease worldwide and the greater need for kidney disease prevention and management.

850 million people around the world suffer from kidney disease. In early 2017, Robin Kmetz from Ladd, Illinois found out she was among them after not feeling well for several months. Not even 60 at the time, by spring Robin was doing home dialysis after being diagnosed with stage 5 renal failure. She was put on the list for a kidney transplant in November 2017.

Robin's four adult children discussed the possibility of donating one of their kidneys to their mother, and it was determined daughter Randi Lind was the best candidate. Randi started undergoing compatibility tests without telling her mom at first, so as not to get her hopes up – or worry her.

Ultimately, the two were not a match, but that didn't stop Randi's donation or Robin from getting a new kidney – they just didn't come from each other.

It's called a kidney paired donation or KPD.

SOT Randi Lind – Donated kidney through paired exchange
(When I tell people I donated a kidney they are like 'did you know who it was going to?' And I'm like well in a roundabout way. And I'll go on and say my mom needed a kidney, I wasn't a blood match for her and so we found out about this program, this pairing program and we were able to pair up and then that way my kidney went off to a stranger and she was able to get one from a stranger. So it's this whole cycle, this whole chain that really made a big difference. :30)

Think of a paired donation like a kidney swap. A living kidney donor who is incompatible with the recipient, like Randi and Robin turned out to be, exchanges kidneys with another donor/recipient pair. In Randi and Robin's case – considered a two-way chain - Robin received a kidney from a man in Minnesota while Randi gave her kidney to a woman in New York – both compete strangers who were on the paired exchange transplant list, which Robin was on in addition to the regular transplant list.

Robin and Randi's operations were done by the transplant team at OSF Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria, Illinois within the span of two days in late May of 2018.

Chains can turn out to be quite long – the OSF Saint Francis team's longest is 13. It's estimated an additional 1,000 – 2,000 donations could be performed each year through the national KPD program.

Robin has sent a thank you card to her donor but has not heard back, while Randi received a card from her recipient, something she gets very emotional talking about.

SOT Randi Lind – Donated kidney through paired exchange
(She's only a few years older than me, she's a mom and has been going through kidney issues for years and it finally came to the point that she needed a transplant and she said that she's doing really good, everything has worked out for her. :21)

SOT Robin Kmetz – Received kidney through paired exchange
(I've become more active and everything since I had it. I didn't have energy or nothing toward the end of my dialysis before I had the transplant and I could feel the change, like my health was starting to go down. Now I've got more energy than I've had in a long time and I just keep pushing myself. :23)

More than 100,000 people are waiting for kidney transplants in the U.S. with a median wait time over 3.5 years. On average, 3,000 people are added to the kidney transplant list each month, while 13 people died each day waiting for a life-saving transplant.

Randi is making it her mission to spread the word about being a living organ donor and the KPD process in hopes of improving those statistics.

SOT Randi Lind – Donated kidney through paired exchange
(It's seems scary, you never quite know the process that's going to go on but it has been the most wonderful thing in my life to know that I've been able to help my mom out and didn't know I would ever have a chance to do that, be able to help this person out that I may never meet and you never know what's gonna happen but you never know but to be able to do something like that to give them a little bit more life it was the best thing that I ever could've done. Even if you're thinking about it if you aren't sure look into it ask questions, there's people out there more than willing to help out with it. :33)

To qualify as a living donor, a person must be physically fit, in good health and free from high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and kidney disease. Individuals considered for living donation are usually between 18 and 65 years of age.

Learn more about becoming a living donor and transplant services offered by OSF HealthCare here.