

'They are very special people'

OSF HealthCare pharmacist encourages others to give the gift of life

Cheryl Weaver is an institution around OSF HealthCare Heart of Mary Medical Center in Urbana, Illinois.

The clinical pharmacist has six identification badges – some of them faded – and plenty of memories from 42 years of work.

But Weaver wouldn't be the happy and healthy person she is today if not for someone throwing her a lifeline in 2020 in the form of a kidney donation.

"Everybody has their own beliefs. I understand that," Weaver says.

"But my belief is that once you're gone and your body is left behind, you should use it, hopefully, to help other people continue to live."

Weaver and others in her family suffer from polycystic kidney disease (PKD). The National Institutes of Health (NIH) describes it as a genetic disorder that causes cysts to grow in the kidneys, possibly leading those organs to fail. NIH says PKD is a common genetic disorder affecting about 500,000 people in the United States.

"Don't worry. You're not going to die from this. You'll get through it. It'll be fine," Weaver recalls her doctor saying at an early appointment.

"That helped a lot," she says.

In 2019, nearly two decades after her diagnosis, Weaver went on dialysis. That's a treatment that helps weak kidneys do what healthy ones normally do – remove fluid and waste from your blood. The downside: you're committed to the machine for hours at a time.

On July 17, 2020, Weaver received a new kidney at a hospital in St. Louis. A lonely experience thanks to visitor restrictions due to the pandemic, but one she was willing to weather if it meant getting some freedoms back.

"You're excited and scared all at once. It's a very interesting feeling," Weaver says of transplant day.

Weaver has monthly bloodwork to make sure the arrow that is her health is still pointing up. But on the whole, she's feeling fine.

Weaver's new kidney came from a person in their 20s who had passed away but had made the decision to be an organ donor. She doesn't know more about the hero, and she probably never will. But just knowing someone made the altruistic decision is enough for her.

"They are very special people," Weaver beams when describing organ donors. "It's a hard time in life, and they have to make a critical decision."

"That's what saved me," she says.

For more information on organ donation – living donations or pledging to donate when you pass away – visit the [OSF HealthCare](#) and [Gift of Hope](#) websites.