

Morgan Templar  
Feature Story  
March 29, 2006

At 7:30 the morning of Sept. 25, 2003, Mark Austin was dressed in a surgical gown with his hair in a blue cap. He had undergone blood tests, a physical exam, an angiogram and a variety of screening tests. He was waiting to give one of his kidneys to a man he had never met.

Austin did see the man who received his kidney. The pre-op room at LDS Hospital just isn't that big, and they both had to be present and ready for surgery before the surgery doctors started the nephrectomy on Austin. Austin, who has worked with organ and transplant service companies for more than 15 years, recognized the telltale signs of someone on anti-rejection drugs and who has needed dialysis for failed kidneys. He doubts the recipient knew who the donor was - Austin was just one more guy in a gown.

"I made my wife promise not to interact with his family in the waiting room," Austin said. "I don't want him to feel any obligation to me."

In the United States 28,110 people received kidney transplants last year. Of those, 6,895 kidneys came from living donors, as reported on the United Network for Organ Sharing Web site. Most living donors are related to the recipient, a growing number are coming from unrelated donors.

In Utah the percent of living donors is significantly higher. According to Cary Wall at Intermountain Donor Services, 43 of the 77 donations in 2005 were from living donors and 16 of those were from unrelated living donors. When Austin donated his kidney he was only the 10<sup>th</sup> unrelated living kidney donor in Utah.

The process of nephrectomy, or kidney removal, is done in a similar procedure to an appendectomy or hysterectomy. It is usually done laparoscopically, a less invasive method

starting with a small incision, usually beginning at the belly button. Several other small incisions of less than one inch are made for a miniature video camera, various clamps and other tools to manipulate the organ and other tissues.

In a nephrectomy, the surgeon must clamp the artery, vein and ureter (the ducts that carry urine from the kidneys) as close to the main artery as possible. Once removed from the donor, the kidney is rinsed in saline to clean it up a bit and then is ready to be implanted.

“My main incision is only about four inches long,” Austin said. “The recipient has an even less invasive procedure. They just slip it in under the muscle tissue and connect it up.”

As of March 26, 2006, there were 65,904 people waiting to receive kidneys in the United States.

Austin would like more people to consider being a living donor. The process is pretty easy, he said. He didn’t need any pain medications except Tylenol after the third day.

“I can’t believe there is any real harm in donating,” he said. “Of course, if I ever got a traumatic injury to my right side, I would need a kidney transplant.”

Austin’s physician advised him that donating might not be the wisest thing to do for his health. But in spite of that advice, Austin is considering donating part of his liver.

“The liver grows back,” Austin said. “It (donating) was one of the great moments of my life. It’s not as hard as it seems as it might be. I would do it again.”

Kathleen Tucker-Bird, MD, an internal medicine doctor in Bountiful, Utah, doesn’t believe it damages your health to be a living donor. But she wouldn’t do it unless it was for one of her children.

“It is a very noble thing, but while it wouldn’t increase your chances of needing a kidney transplant, because you only need one kidney, if anything happened you would need a

transplant,” Tucker-Bird said. “I’ve seen what it means to have a failed kidney with the dialysis and other treatments. I wouldn’t want to risk that.”

For Austin, the risk is worth it.

“I was given good health,” Austin said. “I don’t have a lot of money, but health I have and can give. If you ask why I donate, I say, ‘because I can, so I do.’”

###

Mark Austin, Volunteer Coordinator, Cottonwood Hospital	314-2496
Cary Wall, Intermountain Donor Services, LDS Hospital	408-3090
Kathleen Tucker-Bird, MD, Bountiful Health Center	292-6100
United Network for Organ Sharing	<a href="http://www.unos.org">www.unos.org</a>