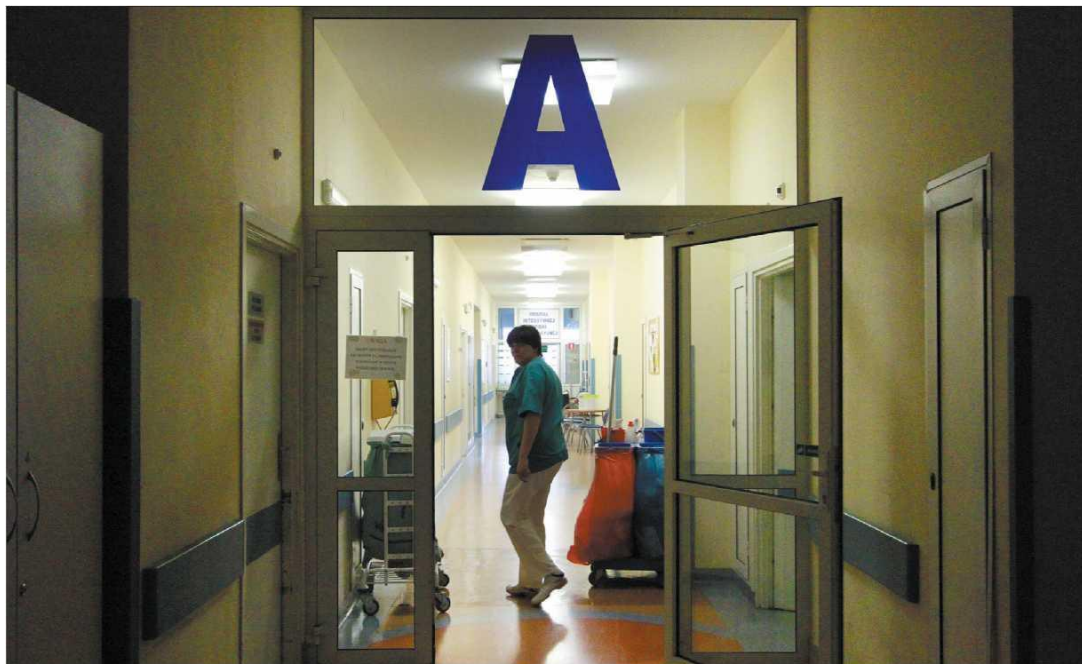


Declaration of consent may save several lives

The great gift of oneself



W ciągu dwóch minionych lat (2012-2013) na oddziale chirurgii ogólnej i transplantologicznej SPSK nr 4 w Lublinie przeprowadzono sześćdziesiąt przeszczepów ratujących ludzkie życie

Over the past two years (2012-2013) 60 life-saving transplants have been carried out in the department of general surgery and transplantology in Lublin hospital SPSK 4.

- I have inside me a gift of love and would like to share this joy with everyone around me - says a patient who received a kidney transplant at the beginning of December in Lublin hospital SPSK 4. Zbigniew is already back home in Gdynia, but Lublin is and will remain a special place for him - the place where he received a chance of a new and better life.

By 7 December 2013, 33 transplants had been carried out so far this year in Lublin hospital SPSK 4 (25 were carried out in 2012). – The number of operations for 2013 may yet increase, as it is not possible to predict how many more operations will be performed this year, said Dr **Jacek Bicki**, transplantation coordinator at Lublin hospital SPSK 4.

In the course of one week at the end of November/beginning of December transplantologists in Lublin carried out eight kidney transplant operations. Taking into account the fact that each operation requires many hours of preparation time and involves a dozen or so people working around the clock, that is a very high figure. – Every transplant is preceded by hours of preparatory work, a brain death certification procedure, followed by a talk with the family, and if the relatives agree, an assessment of donor eligibility, which is essential to check whether the donor suffered from diseases which would render their organs unsuitable for transplantation – explains Dr J. Bicki. He further explains that in the lead-up to surgery, several potential recipients are prepared, as it is impossible to be sure of the current state of health of the first recipient on the waiting list and it is essential to minimise the time between removing the organs and transplanting them.

Transplantation coordinators play a key role in preparing for organ removal and transplantation surgery. – It is our task to provide logistical support (i.e. organising teams to remove organs, in the Biała Podlaska and Zamość hospitals) where a potential donor is found, but also to notify establishments treating potential recipients who are high on the list of those eligible to receive transplants – says the transplantation coordinator for hospital SPSK No 4. - Ranking on the list of recipients is determined by, amongst other things, the match with the donor, the recipient's age and the number of years spent on dialysis. The recipient may be from any town in Poland (Gdańsk, Chorzów, Szczecin, for instance). Of course there are also recipients from smaller places, but the patient must be receiving treatment in specific medical establishments in regional capitals.

On 1 December 2013, a patient from Gdynia, amongst others, received a kidney transplant in the Lublin hospital. – The patient has to be examined before being transported to the transplantation centre. Examinations are also carried out after coming to us, before the operation itself. The operation lasts from two to four hours, sometimes a little longer - it all depends on the individual circumstances. The first days and weeks after the operation are decisive for the prognosis as to whether the recipient's body has accepted the transplant.

I know that here nobody will do me any harm...

- I have a rare blood group: O Rh negative, so the donor must have had the same type, and I can count myself very lucky - affirms **Zbigniew Rosiński**, a retired sea captain living in Gdynia.

After almost two years of dialysis, at 5 p.m. on 30 November 2013, he received a telephone call. - How do you feel? – asked a doctor from the hospital in Gdańsk, where Zbigniew received his health checks. That day was no different to any other day, governed as usual by the dialysis schedule, taking up four hours per day. But Zbigniew felt fine. He's a born optimist and doesn't tend to complain about problems, always looking for the bright side in every situation. – I felt fine and that's what I said, so I was immediately told that a donor had been found for me, but as far away as Lublin. I had to give my consent and of course I didn't have any doubts that I would go to Lublin for the chance of a better life without dialysis. Before making the journey to another town, tests were carried out in the Gdańsk Medical Academy, as the doctor wanted to make sure that there were no contraindications to the transplant surgery.

Since the patient's state of health did not give any cause for concern, after completing the formalities and gathering what he needed from his home, Zbigniew was able to set off for Lublin. – We travelled on a comfortable Poltransplant bus which left around 11 p.m. and by 6.30 a.m. we had already arrived – he recalls. Were you afraid? – No not at all, after 40 years at sea, among waves at times as high as Gdańsk Cathedral and with gale-force winds blowing, having many times had the impression that the end was near, nothing could frighten me now. Moreover, I think that Polish surgeons are the best in the world - that is a subject I know something about since I've been in hospitals in different parts of the world and I know that here nobody will do me any harm - I'm confident they will help me.

Go-ahead for transplant

After arriving in Lublin more tests were carried out and a final decision taken - the transplant would go ahead. In addition to Zbigniew, Katarzyna from Gliwice was also eligible to receive a transplant, and she was the first to undergo the transplant operation on 1 December. She received her kidney from the same donor who enabled Zbigniew to have a new life.

The operation took four hours and when Zbigniew awoke he had a new kidney. How

did he feel? As good as a person can feel when they have been given the chance to have a better-quality life but are still dosed up with painkillers and in a somewhat confused state.

–It all happened quickly, very quickly. I needed to recover and become accustomed to my new situation. But Zbigniew was emboldened by the fact that in the same hospital room lay his new "sister" Katarzyna. – That was another new and surprising experience because I had and still have a biological sister who is a nurse. On 1 December I gained a new "twin sister", who, along with me, was embarking on a new life. We both had our operations on the same day and left the hospital on the same day. I'm sure we'll stay in touch.

Zbigniew is now already back home in Gdynia. He still has to go to the hospital in Gdańsk for health checks of course and has to take medicine to stop his body potentially rejecting the transplanted organ.

Declaration of consent saves lives

Dr Bicki takes the view that transplantation is a team "game", as only by cooperating with local authorities, non-governmental agencies and the media to raise the local population's awareness of this issue can doctors help those in need. – Transplantation is a specific branch of medicine in which public confidence is crucial - explains Dr Bicki. – We transplant organs "donated" by the loved ones of deceased people, who agreed to the removal of the deceased person's organs, but also organs from people who, before they died, completed a declaration of consent to have their organs transplanted to people in need. These people did not legally express an objection to the removal of their organs; what we in fact do is ask what the deceased person thought about donating organs to others after their death.

- Together with local authorities, journalists, and patients whose lives were saved by receiving organ donations, we should show how transplants can save the lives of seriously ill patients – explains Dr Bicki, citing the case of the Poznań journalist who was interested in the subject and prepared a programme on transplantation which was broadcast on regional radio. Some weeks ago, she was admitted to hospital and died two days later. The declaration of consent which the journalist completed during the information campaign enabled her organs to be removed and three lives to be saved. – Other Poznań journalists have now joined the transplantation awareness-raising campaign, not only describing the example set by their colleague but above all showing what a great and tangible impact not only words but also more importantly real action can have. It saves lives.

In Dr Bicki's opinion, the system for promoting transplantation, for instance in Belgium, whereby anyone can fill out a declaration of consent in any municipal office they happen to have business in, is good practice and should be imitated. It would be worth introducing that system here in Poland, in Lublin.

Jerzy Kuś, director of Lublin City Council's Health Department, is very interested in working together with the transplantology doctors in SPSK No 4 to organise an information campaign and any other measures promoting transplantation to raise awareness among the city's residents and also among young people in schools.

- I spoke at the outset with the Lublin City Council's Education Department and together we will encourage headmasters to organise lessons with the participation of transplantology doctors from SPSK No 4 - says Director J. Kuś. – We are open to all initiatives, and I therefore welcome the idea of promoting transplantation among the town's inhabitants, as it is promoted in Belgium. In the City Council there are also places where we can display brochures, educational material and declarations of consent to donate organs for transplantation.

Kelly was taught to help others...

Over ten years ago, there was an accident in a house in the suburbs of Brussels. A little girl who was almost ten years old fell from the stairs on the first floor. She sustained a serious head injury and fell into a coma and the doctors told her parents that her chances of recovering and leading a normal life were minimal. After several days, Kelly's condition deteriorated to such an extent that the doctors asked the parents for their consent to the removal of the child's organs for transplant. – We didn't think about it for long, although the decision was not an easy one - recalls **Lia Van Kempen**, Kelly's mother. – She thought about her life with Kelly, who was a cheerful, kind and sensitive child. We taught her to help others and suddenly we, as parents, were presented with a challenge - the need to help others waiting for an organ transplant. Lia Van Kempen affirms that she would be very happy to meet the people whose lives Kelly saved. – Our daughter's organs helped three people – two children and a man – says Kelly's mother. Had she survived the accident, Kelly would now be 22 years old.

Lia Van Kempen is now active in an association which aims, amongst other things, to support the families of donors. As Kelly's mother says, the most difficult times for those families are always the festive holidays, and so, before Christmas, the association's members send greetings cards to the families, organise meetings and participate in conferences and workshops organised, for example, by the European Commission in Brussels, in order to share their difficult experiences. – Kelly was taught to help others – says Lia Van Kempen, presenting photos of her smiling daughter while struggling to contain her emotions. But no-one - whether a journalist, a relative of a donor or an EU official - who participates in such meetings is ashamed of tears - tears of emotion, because these meetings are never forgotten and are vital to bring the subject of transplantation closer to home, including here in Lublin.

The most beautiful gift of love

Zbigniew Rosiński emphasises how grateful he is to the family of the donor from whom he received a kidney. – It is the most beautiful gift, a gift which required considerable thought on the part of the family but also quite possibly on the part of the donor himself – I know only that the donor was a man – he may have taken the decision himself and completed a special declaration. Our pope John Paul II spoke and wrote about organ donation as the most beautiful gift of love that we can give others - and that is the truth. I have inside me that gift and I would like to share this joy with others around me. This is a feeling which is difficult to put into words.

MAGDALENA POKRZYCKA – WALCZAK