Larry Timms remembers 1969 like it was yesterday. That's because it's the year he received a gift from his sister that saved his life.

“She was married with a 6-month-old baby at the time. But when she found out she was a match, she didn't think twice about giving me one of her kidneys,” Mr. Timms said of his older sister Sherry, a hairdresser in Sylvania, where they both still live.

Mr. Timms, whose transplant was just the fourth one at MCGHealth, remembers the details well, especially the worry he had for his sister, who was risking her life with a young family at home. He also hasn't forgotten the 13 hours of surgery he endured at just 18 years old, followed by several months of hospitalization. His surgeon Dr. Arthur Humphries, Jr. was almost always at his side.

“He was so concerned about me, and the transplant program was so new. He would sleep in my room most nights, just to keep an eye on me,” recalls the 58-year-old husband and father of two.

“I was such a worry-wart,” admits Dr. Humphries, the founding director of the kidney transplant program. He joined Mr. Timms and hundreds of transplant survivors on September 9, 2008 for the program’s 40th anniversary celebration.

“It was great to see Larry Timms and all the others again,” said the surgical pioneer. Dr. Humphries retired in 1997, after performing more than 500 kidney transplants in 29 years. “I am very proud to have helped so many. I had a good time.”
Kidney and Pancreas Transplant Program

The MCGHealth Kidney and Pancreas Transplant Program’s first transplant occurred on August 28, 1968. Since that time, the program has performed over 1880 transplants. The waiting list growth and transplantation rate is competitive with other transplant centers in the region. However, MCGHealth’s dedication to patients through Patient Family Centered Care principles sets us apart from others.

The MCGHealth Kidney and Pancreas Transplant Program recognizes that transplantation can be an unsettling experience for patients and their families. We believe that regardless of where patients are in the transplant process, they never need to face these concerns and this anxiety alone. Our dedicated transplant team recognizes the special needs of transplant patients and understands that living with a transplant may affect patients’ lifestyles in many ways. We endeavor to help patients resume many of their former activities and we encourage patients to maximize their quality of life.

For more information about Kidney and Pancreas Transplant services at MCGHealth, call 706-721-2888 or 1-800-736-2273, ext 2888. You may also email kidney_transplant@mcg.edu.

Living Kidney Donor Information

The experience of being a living kidney donor can be a wonderful and gratifying life event. In most cases the kidney transplant is successful and the recipient receives the chance to live a life as close to normal as possible. The vast majority of recipients have better, longer lives because of the donor’s generous gift. It is very normal to have many questions and concerns about living donation. The decision to donate a kidney is an important and personal one. We want to provide donors with as much information as possible about the transplant process. Any potential living donors may contact our donor coordinator, Pamela Grubbs, RN, at 706-721-8560.

The living donor evaluation is performed in steps and includes compatibility testing, labs, X-rays and a visit with our donor nephrologist and our donor advocate. We strive to make the donor evaluation process as convenient as possible for the donor.

We can also assist the donor in applying for financial assistance to relieve any financial burden associated with donation and recovery. Details regarding this process will be discussed with donors during the evaluation process.

Team Member Spotlight: Ada Brownson, Financial Coordinator

MCGHealth offers a unique service to transplant patients. As the financial coordinator for the Kidney and Pancreas Transplant Program, Ada Brownson works with patients and their families throughout the transplant process to educate and clarify patient-specific financial aspects of transplant care. She assists with insurance coverage verification for transplant surgery and post-transplant medications. Ada also works as an advisor on federal and state programs which may benefit patients financially. In addition, she provides guidance to patients applying for assistance from programs such as the Georgia Transplant Foundation’s matched fundraising savings account.
Referral Information:
For Physicians and Dialysis Centers

MCGHealth Comprehensive Transplant Program is committed to quality patient care and to make your referral process as pleasant and smooth as possible.

The following are necessary for timely, accurate processing of patient referrals:

- Completed Transplant Referral Form. For your convenience, the form can be downloaded at mcghealth.org/transplant, click on Kidney and Transplant, then Referral Information.
- Copy of the front and back of the patient’s insurance card(s).

We have a dedicated staff of administrative professionals, registered nurses and financial coordinators who will keep you informed via telephone, fax and written communication regarding your patient’s progress throughout the transplant evaluation process.

Quarterly Status Reports

Quarterly Patient Status Reports will be mailed to referring physicians and dialysis centers indicating the status of all patients referred to the transplant program. Reports can also be sent upon request.

Please feel free to contact the Transplant Program office at 706-721-2888 or 800-736-2273 extension 2888 if you have any questions or concerns regarding your patients.

Who should be referred?

- Patients with ongoing addiction to alcohol or drugs are not transplant candidates.
- Patients may be evaluated and placed on the deceased donor transplant waiting list at any time, but will begin accruing time points only when their creatinine clearance is 20 mL/min or less.
- We suggest that preparation for dialysis and transplantation be made at the same time so that, if transplantation is not possible, dialysis can be instituted when necessary.

Team Member Spotlight, continued

Each patient’s financial obligations and insurance coverage is carefully considered. For those patients who need to raise money, Ada works with patients individually and/or with their family to determine a savings goal or “proof of savings.” This is designed to help patients afford immunosuppressive medications for the first year after the transplant. Ada assesses patient’s insurance coverage for all aspects of transplantation and educates them on the importance of having a financial plan for post-transplant care. She provides patients and family members with fundraising information and suggestions on how to coordinate successful fundraisers.

If you have a patient who expresses financial concerns about the costs of transplantation, please contact Ada. She would gladly answer your questions and assist with educating your patients.
Meet the Faculty

Dr. James Wynn joined MCGHealth as a transplant surgeon in 1987 after completing his transplant surgery training at the University of Florida. He serves as the program’s director. His surgical interests include kidney and pancreas transplantation and dialysis access. He also serves as Vice President/President Elect of the Board of Directors for United Network for Organ Sharing.

Dr. Todd Merchen joined the program in 2007. Dr. Merchen, who completed his transplant surgery training at the University of Cincinnati, was director of the kidney transplant program in Spokane, Washington prior to coming to MCGHealth. In addition to kidney and pancreas transplantation, he specializes in laparoscopic nephrectomy, hepatobiliary surgery and vascular access.

Dr. Laura Mulloy is the primary transplant nephrologist. She completed her training at the Medical College of Georgia and is currently the Director of Transplant Nephrology and Chief of the Section of Nephrology, Hypertension and Transplant Medicine in the Department of Medicine.

Dr. Muralidharan Jagadeesan joined the program in 1997. "Dr. J" completed his transplant nephrology fellowship in Toronto prior to coming to MCGHealth. He has clinical interests in general nephrology and renal transplantation.

Dr. Luis Ortiz came to MCGHealth in 2002 after completing his pediatric nephrology training at the UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. Dr. Ortiz is the acting chief of the Section of Pediatric Nephrology in the Department of Pediatrics.

Dr. Obioma Nwobi joined the MCGHealth Pediatric Transplant program in October 2007. Prior to coming to the MCGHealth Children’s Medical Center, he completed his pediatric nephrology training at the University of Miami.

Dr. Pamela Fall joined MCGHealth as a clinical nephrologist in 1994 after completing her fellowship training at Vanderbilt University. Dr. Fall is responsible for evaluating all potential kidney donors for the transplant program.

Dr. James Brown joined MCGHealth as head of the section of urologic oncology in 2001 after training at the Mayo Clinic and serving in the United States Air Force. He subsequently completed a urologic laparoscopy and minimally invasive urologic oncology fellowship program. He also serves as the division’s primary laparoendoscopic surgeon. In November 2003, he initiated the laparoscopic donor nephrectomy program.

Bill Wolff, PA-C joined MCGHealth Transplant Program in August 1983 after graduating from the MCG Physician Assistant program. He has worked in different capacities of the program with focus on evaluation of patients referred for kidney transplant consideration.