SPOTLIGHT:

UNIVERSITY of MARYLAND MEDICAL CENTER

Going the Distance

Seattle woman treks 3,000 miles for complex kidney transplant at UMMC

Like all kidney transplant patients, Hays will receive regular follow-up care for the rest of her life—in this case, close to home, but she's also followed by UMMC.

Elisa Hays, a professional speaker in Seattle, traveled to the University of Maryland Medical Center for a kidney transplant, because it's one of the few centers in the nation capable of performing the complex surgery she needed.

In the aftermath of a gruesome automobile accident that nearly killed Elisa Hays, the Seattle woman's life was largely defined by numbers: 105 days in the hospital; 20-plus surgeries; dozens of rod, bolts and other hardware fusing together her broken bones; chronically elevated levels of creatinine—a waste product from muscles normally filtered by the kidneys—indicating the 48-year-old mother of three had two failing kidneys and would need a transplant.

The happy news that her brother, Matt, was a tissue match and willing to donate a kidney didn't end the numbers game for Hays. Her long medical odyssey also included the 3,000 miles she would travel to the University of Maryland Medical Center, one of the few centers in the nation capable of the complex transplant surgery she needed because of an anatomical oddity on her brother's kidneys.

Most people have only one artery extending from each kidney, but about 1 percent of donor kidneys have three or more. Matt, who had several renal arteries, was among that rare group. This situation prompts many hospitals—even those with high-volume kidney transplantation programs—to back away from doing the procedure, as Hays' local facility did.

But Hays, a professional speaker focused on motivation/inspiration and leadership, wouldn't give up. She had already come too far from the snowy night in March 2014, when she was struck by a semitractor-trailer while trying to move to safety after her own truck and trailer jackknifed on black ice on an Oklahoma interstate. She had not been expected to live, but had somehow clawed her way back.

Hays, who describes herself as "ridiculously tenacious," quickly learned from a Web search that UMMC routinely performs kidney transplants using living donors with multiple renal arteries. Several days and phone calls later, Hays was told that UMMC chairman of surgery Stephen T. Bartlett, MD, would do her operation.

OUTSTANDING OUTCOMES IN COMPLEX TRANSPLANTS

"I was stunned and ecstatic," recalls Hays, whose accident injuries included an open fracture of her pelvis requiring an "erector set" of hardware, along with a broken leg, hand and ribs, a collapsed lung and a head wound. Hays was not willing to continue subsequent kidney dialysis, an experience she termed "depressing," and wanted to take the chance that a

transplant would improve her overall situation. She felt fortunate that UMMC was willing, in turn, to take a chance on her.

Dr. Bartlett, who is also the executive vice president and surgeon in chief for the University of Maryland Medical System, is a board-certified vascular surgeon experienced in microsurgery—a skill crucial during multiple renal artery kidney transplants. Last September, Hays received her brother’s left kidney in a successful surgery that left both of them healthy and relieved.

Like most kidney donors, Matt left the hospital soon after the operation and was back to his routine quickly. Hays remained in Baltimore for a month for follow-up care, and will be followed for life at UMMC in addition to regular care in her home state.

“UMMC has excelled in using kidneys that are anatomically challenged, and that’s why people seek us out,” explains Dr. Bartlett, the Peter Angelos Distinguished Professor of Surgery at University of Maryland School of Medicine. “Our outcomes are outstanding and we’ve never had a donor death in 24 years.”

Hays, whose creatinine levels are now normal, is relishing simple things such as eating nachos crammed with cheese, avocados, beans and tomatoes—all foods that previously would have sent her creatinine levels soaring dangerously.

“I’m so glad we went to Baltimore and my whole family said there’s no doubt we made the right choice,” Hays says. “Studies have shown that a well-matched kidney from a sibling stands a better chance of long-term survival. So for us, it made sense to find someone who could do that surgery.” ♦

MORNING GLORY!

Your morning can set the tone for your entire day, so follow this timeline to hack your way to a better a.m.

Step 1 Before you even open your eyes, wake up your body with gentle, easy stretches. Point and flex your feet for about 10 seconds; then make fists with your hands and release, repeating for 10 seconds. Next, turn your head from side to side a few times.

Step 2 While the water for your shower is warming up, squeeze in a quick stress reliever: Sit down, close your eyes and take at least five big, deep breaths—in through your nose, out through your mouth.

Step 3 Turn your shower temperature from scalding to warm, which will keep your skin from drying out.

Step 4 For your first (very important) meal of the day, choose something that has carbs (for energy) and fiber (to help you feel fuller longer). Try yogurt topped with granola and fruit, or a slice of whole-wheat toast with a thin piece of low-fat cheese.

Step 5 Brush your ... tongue. This gets rid of bad breath bacteria. And obviously, don't forget about your teeth.

A GOOD DAY BEGINS WITH A GOOD NIGHT

If not getting enough ZZZs is normal for you, you're putting yourself at risk for chronic health problems down the road, including obesity, diabetes, depression and heart attack. But you won't just feel the effects of sleep deprivation tomorrow. Skimping on shuteye can make your today harder than it has to be by affecting:

1. YOUR MOOD. Cranky, irritable and can't concentrate? You probably didn't log the 7 to 8 hours of sleep you need—that's per night, not per week.

2. YOUR DRIVING. Drowsy drivers are just as impaired—or even more so—than drunk drivers.

3. YOUR APPETITE. As the number of hours of sleep you get goes down, your risk for obesity goes up. That's because sleep helps regulate the hormones that make you feel hungry and full.