Organ Transplant Information

Recently, I read an article in Men’s Health magazine about former NBA star Nate Robinson and his battle with kidney disease. Nate is on dialysis and hoping for kidney transplant.

This article hit home for me. Polycystic Kidney Disease (PKD) runs in my family. I am fortunate to not have this disease; however, it has impacted my grandfather, father, brother, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

I had the good fortune to be a perfect match for my father and donated a kidney to him in 1979. The kidney was still working fine when he passed from unrelated issues in 2010.

Back to the Men’s Health article. Mr. Robinson’s kidneys no longer do their job in filtering toxins from his blood. He – and – many others – must have dialysis three times per week to do the job their kidneys are no longer able to do. For many in this situation, the best path is to receive a kidney transplant. The irony of this is that one must be healthy enough to qualify for the transplant waiting list.

This irony impacted my brother. He had a transplant with a kidney donated by his wife. After 17 years, an illness with a hospital stay resulted in him losing the kidney. It was more than two years later that he was deemed healthy enough to return to the transplant waiting list.

Why am I telling you this? Data. Isn’t data always the answer? That’s a rhetorical question, but data is the reason I write this article. The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) has a big mission, and I encourage you to check them out at <https://unos.org/about/>. One thing UNOS provides is access to data related to organ transplantation. I was particularly interested in wait list data.

## Wait List – by Gender

As of August 2, 2024, there were 106,783 people waiting on an organ transplant. The plotly table below provides a breakdown of this data by gender and was generated with the following code: <>

A table with numbers and letters

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Table 1: Organ Transplant Wait List by Gender

You can see that a stunning 84% of those waiting on an organ transplant are waiting for a kidney and that, across all organs, there are more males than females awaiting an organ.

## Wait List – Age

If we look at the data by age group, we can see that the bulk of those waiting on an organ are 35-years old or older, with the 50–64-year age group (42%) leading the way.

A graph of age groups

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Figure 1: Organ Transplant Wait List by Age Group

As one may expect, if we filter the age chart to show only those waiting for a kidney, we see essentially the same chart with the bulk of those waiting on an organ 35-years old or older.

A graph of age groups

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Figure 2: Kidney Transplant Wait List by Age Group

## Wait List – Ethnicity

If we look at the data by ethnic group, we see the largest percentage waiting (39%) is “White – Non-Hispanic,” followed by “Black – Non-Hispanic” (27%) and “Hispanic/Latino (23%).

A graph of different colored squares

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Figure 3: Organ Transplant Wait List by Ethnic Group

Once again, if we filter the ethnicity chart to show only those waiting for a kidney, we see essentially the same chart with the “White, Non-Hispanic” being the highest percentage waiting.

A graph with blue and purple bars

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Figure 4: Kidney Transplant Wait List by Ethnic Group

The reasons for the disparity among ethnic groups are beyond the scope of this article. There are relevant studies and associated data and, for those interested, I’d encourage you to investigate it.

## What can you do?

As one can see, there are a lot of sick people in need of a donated organ. Oftentimes, the organ comes from a cadaver, meaning someone has passed away and the organs were donated. My father was fortunate. I was a perfect match, and I was willing to do it. I’m not a hero. My father was in his early 40’s and he was dying. I believe anyone in my position would do the same thing.

I encourage you to sign up via your state’s registry. You can find this at <https://www.organdonor.gov/sign-up>. When you do so, be sure to inform your loved ones, so they know your wishes.

Kidney and liver donation can also come from living donors and many people donate organs altruistically. I have lived for 45 years with one kidney with no ill effects. During that time, I have made a point to take good care of myself. I am a healthy eater and exercise at least 5 days a week. That’s not for everybody, but my point is, a person can live a healthy live with one kidney.

Thank you for listening.