

# UW Health: Led nation in paired kidney exchanges for 2020

Posted on Wednesday, Apr 21, 2021

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MADISON — The UW Health Transplant Center performed 64 paired kidney exchanges in 2020, more than any other transplant center in the country. This is the first time UW Health has led the nation in this type of lifesaving transplant option since the first paired kidney exchange was performed in the United States in 2000.

Paired kidney exchange, also known as a Kidney Paired Donation or a kidney swap, is a transplant option for people who have a living donor who is medically able but cannot donate a kidney to them because of blood type or antibody incompatibility. Paired kidney exchange overcomes donor-recipient incompatibility by swapping kidneys between other donor-recipient pairs. It also allows for improved matching between a larger pool of donors and recipients.

“The fact that we were able to facilitate so many paired kidney exchanges, despite having to temporarily close our living donation program twice during the COVID-19 pandemic, speaks volumes about the commitment of this entire transplant team, particularly the surgical, medical and nursing leaders and their staff,” says Dr. Dixon Kaufman, medical director of the UW Health Transplant Center. “Time and again our staff rise to the challenge of the day to provide our patients with the opportunity to live longer, healthier lives. It’s what drives us forward and, ultimately, what makes us successful.”

According to a 2019 study, paired kidney exchanges improve overall transplant quality, which leads to fewer transplanted kidneys failing. Kidney exchanges also reduce waiting times for patients needing kidney transplants, resulting in

substantial health care cost savings. UW Health develops its paired kidney exchanges through the National Kidney Registry (NKR), a non-profit national registry that facilitates more than 450 paired kidney exchange transplants annually. UW Health has transplanted 312 people through the NKR program, making it one of the registry's most successful transplant center partnerships in its 13-year history.

“What the UW Health Transplant Center was able to accomplish during the pandemic is nothing short of phenomenal,” says Gareth Hil, founder and CEO of the National Kidney Registry. “UW Health is consistently one of our most successful members and their commitment to improving and saving lives through paired kidney exchange has given so many people a second chance at life, both within Wisconsin and around the country.”

This latest accomplishment caps a record-breaking year for the UW Health Transplant Center, during which 548 patients got organ transplants at University Hospital—the most in the program's 54-year history.

Kidney exchanges involving more than two recipients are called kidney chains, during which multiple people can benefit. In 2015, UW Health participated in the longest kidney chain ever completed, which was supported by the combined efforts of 25 transplant centers and included 70 surgeries (35 donations and 35 transplants). The first and last transplants of this massive chain were performed at University Hospital and included a total of five UW Health patients.

To learn more about paired kidney exchanges and living kidney donation, visit [uwhealth.org/livingdonor](https://uwhealth.org/livingdonor)