



MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

BC Transplant celebrates 40th anniversary of province's first organ transplant

More than 4,500 lives saved but only 16 per cent of British Columbians on donor registry

Vancouver, BC – Oct. 23, 2008 – Tomorrow BC Transplant, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, celebrates the 40th anniversary of the first organ transplant in BC. The first organ transplant – a kidney – was performed at Vancouver General Hospital on Oct. 24, 1968.

“Organ transplantation has come a long way and saved many lives since its beginnings in 1968. Health care in this province relies on this advancing technology and the generosity of others to ensure many more lives are saved now and into the future. In recognition of this milestone, we urge all British Columbians to make a life-saving decision by registering their names with the Organ Donor Registry,” said Health Services Minister George Abbott.

Amanda Poch, 29, has personally experienced the life-and-death necessity of an organ donation. Diagnosed at the tender age of 20 with an inherited auto-immune disease, chronic-active hepatitis, Poch weathered years of medication side-effects and social stigma associated with the disease before her health severely deteriorated.

When she was 26, cirrhosis of the liver was diagnosed with only five per cent of her liver still functioning. She fell into an 11-day liver coma – encephalopathy – until she was woken by a doctor who informed her she had received a liver transplant the night before.

Since then, Poch, a development coordinator for the Canadian Liver Foundation, has fully recovered and now maintains a healthy lifestyle through diet and exercise, and even participates in the “Gift of Life” dragon boat team.

“The liver donation not only gave me life, it gave me the opportunity to support the cause of organ donation so that more lives will be saved. I will be forever grateful to the generous individual who gave me this liver, and to the medical technology that made my transplant possible,” said Poch.

Over the years, BC Transplant has seen significant advances in the area of organ transplantation, resulting in better outcomes and survival for transplant recipients. Between 1968 and 1985, the five year graft survival rate for kidney transplants was 55 per cent. Today is it almost 89 per cent.

Living donation was once restricted to close family members with a strong genetic link but, with improvements in anti-rejection medications, this is no longer the case as spouses, friends, and co-workers routinely donate. Donors can also now anonymously donate a kidney to recipients they don't know.

Surgical procedures have also improved. Today most kidneys are removed using a minimally invasive technique known as laparoscopy which results in much less post-operative pain and a significantly earlier return to normal activities than previously possible, reducing recovery time for the donor from six to two weeks.

Other recent advances in organ transplantation technology over the years include:

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- Better anti-rejection medications for patients leading to reduced rejection and longer survival rates;
- Prominence in living donation;
- Introduction of BC's Organ Donor Registry (only one of its kind in Canada).

This past June, BC became the first province in Canada to offer an online, legal organ donor consent system incorporating digital signature technology. British Columbians can now register their decision on BC's Organ Donor Registry more quickly and efficiently using the customized donor registration form – <https://www.transplant.bc.ca/onlinereg/bcts.asp> – that offers a legal and paperless online alternative to mailing in forms.

“Since the introduction of the online, digital organ registry, the number of people registering online has almost doubled compared to the same period with the previous system when registrants had to print the completed registration form, then sign and fax it, or scan and email it to us. We're hoping that the elimination of these administrative barriers will encourage British Columbians to go online and register today,” said Bill Barrable, BC Transplant provincial executive director.

BC's Organ Donor Registry (ODR) was introduced 11 years ago, and replaced the system of placing a decal on your Driver's Licence or CareCard. Currently, more than 680,000 British Columbians – or 16 per cent of the population – have registered on the Organ Donor Registry.

About BC Transplant

BC Transplant is an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. Over the past four decades, more than 4,500 British Columbians have received a life-saving organ transplant.

Hundreds of British Columbians are waiting for a life-saving transplant. What are you waiting for? Register at www.transplant.bc.ca or call 1.800.663.6189.

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