



INTERLINK®
TRANSPLANT, CANCER, ESRD, GENE & CELL THERAPY

SPECIAL EDITION

TRANSPLANT NEWSLETTER

Telling the amazing story of a nurse who was moved to donate and save a life.



An Interview With Mary Braden, RN

BY ANTONINA WHITE, TRANSPLANT ACCOUNT MANAGER

Every year, thousands of people wait anxiously for a life-saving kidney transplant – many of them waiting years, while their health steadily declines. But there's hope: live kidney donation is one of the most powerful acts of generosity a person can offer. Unlike other organs, we are born with two kidneys, but only need one to live a healthy, full life. This means one person has the ability to give another a second chance at life.

Live kidney donation offers better outcomes for recipients – shorter wait times, improved long-term health, and in many cases, the chance to avoid dialysis altogether. For the donor, it's a chance to create a profound, lasting impact. The process is safe, carefully monitored, and supported by medical teams every step of the way.

Becoming a live donor isn't just about giving a kidney – it's about giving someone more birthdays, more family dinners, more walks in the sunshine. It's about choosing compassion in action. If you've ever wondered how you can make a difference, consider becoming a live kidney donor.

One decision can change – and save – a life.

Maryland Physicians' Care partners with INTERLINK Health Services for transplant access. As a valued partner, INTERLINK invites Mary to attend all the medical education programs that INTERLINK offers. It was in 2024 that an INTERLINK webinar caught Mary's eye. The webinar was on kidney transplant and presented by Barnes Jewish, a key partner of INTERLINK located in St. Louis, MO

The Partners who made this possible



DONATE

When Mary Braden, a nurse with Maryland Physicians Care, saw a flyer seeking an O-negative kidney donor, she didn't hesitate. "I was like, wait, I have two of those. Why not?" she recalled.

Mary had long been aware of live kidney donation, having known people in her life who had donated or received kidneys. She even saw a Medical Round Table that INTERLINK had hosted showing a video of kidney donation. But this was her chance to directly make a difference. "I just knew people donated kidneys and got them. It's just always been a thing," she said.



Mary's path to nursing was not a straight one. "I was a late comer to nursing. I didn't start nursing school until my mid-30s. I wanted to be a nurse since I was a tiny, tiny child," she explained. After completing her nursing education, Mary began her career in the oncology unit, where she worked for a decade. "When I graduated, they offered me a full-time gig there. I did that for a decade and then shifted over into case management," she said. Her nursing experience then led her to a role with a Medicaid-managed care organization in Maryland, where she primarily worked on hepatitis C-related tasks. It was in this position that Mary's responsibilities expanded to include transplant-related work. Mary's extensive nursing background and her newfound expertise in the transplant field proved invaluable when she decided to become a live kidney donor herself. Her medical knowledge and understanding of the process helped her navigate the evaluation and recovery with confidence.

"I really liked how clinically well taken care of I felt. Like, they would never have let me donate unless I was going to be okay. So that's a contender for the best part of it is that I felt totally held and supported by the clinical team in every last bit,"

MARY BRADEN





The evaluation process was extensive, involving multiple tests and meetings with the medical team at **UPMC, located in Pittsburgh, PA**. One of the most rewarding aspects of Mary's kidney donation journey was the exceptional care she received from the medical team at UPMC. As a nurse herself, Mary was impressed by the level of professionalism and support she experienced throughout the process.

"I really liked how clinically well taken care of I felt. Like, they would never have let me donate unless I was going to be okay. So that's a contender for the best part of it is that I felt totally held and supported by the clinical team in every last bit," Mary shared.

The UPMC team went to great lengths to ensure Mary's safety and well-being, both physically and emotionally. From the initial evaluation to the surgery and recovery, Mary felt that she was in the best possible hands.

"The surgeon, Dr. Tevar, was like, 'Your kidneys are the most important thing in my entire life. I am in the room with you and I will not let anything happen,'" Mary recounted, expressing her immense gratitude for the surgeon's dedication and reassurance.

As a nurse herself, Mary felt well-prepared and confident throughout. "The workup is real and pretty intense. They make sure that you can survive with just one kidney with no problem," she explained.

One of the most crucial steps was the GFR (glomerular filtration rate) test, which measures kidney function. "They put radioactive stuff in there and see how long it takes to flush," Mary described. This, along with a battery of other examinations, ensured that Mary was in optimal health to donate.

Mary's experience with the UPMC team was a testament to the exceptional level of care and support available for live kidney donors. This level of dedication and compassion played a crucial role in Mary's decision to donate and her ability to navigate the process with confidence and peace of mind.

90,000

Close to 90,000 people in the US are waiting for a kidney donation.

86%

86% of patients waiting are in need of a kidney.

3-5

3-5 years is the average waiting time for a kidney from a deceased donor.



Every 8 minutes another person is added to the national transplant waiting list.



With living donation, a patient may be able to receive a transplant in less time.

18

Generally, living donors will have a full medical exam, must be at least 18 years old, and in good physical and mental health.

Mary's employer was incredibly supportive, providing her with disability coverage, paid time off, and assistance navigating the logistics. "They were completely in favor of it. They were all really supportive," she shared.

One of the unexpected hurdles was the reaction from Mary's own family and friends. "When it was just an idea, everyone was really into it. And in fact, part of the workup was like, do you have good support at home? Does everybody want you to go ahead and proceed with this?" she explained. However, as the reality of the surgery set in, some of her loved ones expressed concerns and apprehension. "It stirs up a lot of stuff," Mary acknowledged, emphasizing the importance of having a support system in place to navigate these emotional waters.

On the day of the surgery, Mary was overjoyed. "I was high as a kite. The whole thing was a celebration, even after surgery, when everything hurt," she said. Her recipient's family was there, and it felt like a joyful occasion for everyone involved.

The recovery process had its challenges, with Mary needing to manage pain and discomfort for the first few weeks. She advises future donors to prioritize self-care and lean on their support system. "Have people come have tea with you, let them be really nice to you and make sure everything you like is right there," she recommended.

The most rewarding aspect for Mary has been the connection she now shares with her recipient. "There's just nothing bad about that. You end up with a whole other family," she expressed. The two have been in regular communication, with Mary even naming the kidney "Lazarus" as a nod to its journey.

Looking back, Mary has no regrets. "This is a better thing. Like there is. You can go from being you, your little bubble with your family, friends and your job to suddenly a participant in making the world incredibly better for not only one other person, but everyone," she said.



Mary's message to those considering live donation is clear: "We all know that the way to... feel best in this world is giving to somebody else. And this is a way to just fill your life up with that. And it changes it forever."

If you are interested in learning more about live kidney donation, please reach out to INTERLINK Health or visit DonateLife.net. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of those in need.