First HIV-to-HIV Organ Transplants Performed

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Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore has performed the first organ transplants from an HIV-positive donor to HIV-positive recipients, the Baltimore Sun reports.

One donor, an HIV-positive woman who recently died, provided a liver to one recipient and a kidney to another. According to Johns Hopkins, both recipients are doing well; one has already left the hospital, and the other will be discharged soon.

Since 1984, organ transplants between two HIV-positive people were prohibited. Thanks to advocacy by transplant surgeon Dorry L. Segev of Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, the ban was lifted when the HIV Organ Policy Equity (HOPE) Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Obama. In February of this year, Johns Hopkins became the first hospital to be approved for the transplants.

According to research by Segev, about 500 to 600 HIV-positive donors would be eligible to donate kidneys, livers and other organs once the ban was lifted, which would save about 1,000 lives each year.

Hospital protocols require that the donor and recipient be on similar HIV-drug regimens.

The donor and recipients remain anonymous. But the Baltimore Sun reports that the donor's family provided a statement to the New England Organ Bank. "From early childhood she always stuck up for the underdog," said the statement. "HIV was not a choice she made, but she fought it for herself and our family every day. As we all know, HIV is a stigma and people with the disease are unfortunately at times treated differently.... She was able to leave this world helping those underdogs she fought so hard for."

Read POZ's March 2012 cover story "The Right to Give Life" to learn about one couple's battle to overturn the ban on HIV-positive organ transplants.

Below is an ABC news report on the transplants.

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