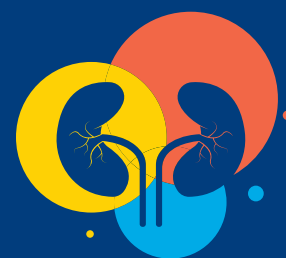


Breaking Free

Living well with kidney disease.

A publication of MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute



Double transplants can help eliminate diabetes and kidney failure. page 6

Our newest kidney evaluation clinic at MedStar Franklin Square Medical Center. page 8

Learn how social workers can help every step of the transplant journey. page 10



**MedStar Georgetown
Transplant Institute**

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ON THE COVER: Kidney transplant recipient Virginia Hergenroeder is back to riding the horse she loves, thanks to her husband, a living donor who was part of a paired kidney exchange, and the team at MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute.

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Welcome

A message from Jose Figueiro, MD

If you are considering or awaiting a kidney and/or pancreas transplant, the MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute is with you, every step in your journey. Our experienced team partners with you before, during, and after your transplant to help improve your quality of life, give you freedom from dialysis, and allow you to return to everyday activities sooner with better, long-term health.

We have the largest kidney and pancreas transplant program in the United States by volume and our kidney program is the ninth largest in the nation, according to the Organ Procurement Transplant Network (OPTN). You can see the regional data on page 7 of this newsletter.

Patients at MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute receive transplants as quickly and safely as possible and have excellent results. Our program has numerous benefits, including dual-listing, which means that if you are listed with another transplant program, you can be listed with us, too. And, if you've been denied a transplant by another program, we encourage you to contact us for another opinion. Many patients who have been refused at other centers have been accepted to our transplant program.

In this issue of *Breaking Free*, we share a heartfelt story of a patient who needed a kidney transplant. Her husband planned to be her living donor; however, those plans changed for good reason. Due to our paired kidney exchange program, two patients, instead of one, received life-saving transplants. We'll share myths and facts about becoming a living donor, as well as introduce you to pre-transplant social worker Gabi Pirro, MSN, LICSW. She understands how overwhelming the transplant process can be and answers questions, provides support and resources, plus so much more—all with compassion.

The team at MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute is dedicated to caring for you and your new organ for a lifetime. At MedStar Health, *it's how we treat people.*

In good health,

Jose Figueiro, MD

Director, Kidney and Pancreas Transplantation
MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute

Paired kidney transplant gives patient a second chance at her active life without dialysis.

Movement has always been at the center of Virginia Hergenroeder's life in Middleburg, VA. As an athlete, equestrian, and artist, she built her days around early morning runs, weight training, and long walks. "You have to keep moving," she says. "That's always been my way."

That rhythm changed in 2025, nearly three decades after she survived Goodpasture syndrome, a rare autoimmune disease that once threatened both her kidneys and lungs. This condition causes inflammation, bleeding, and long-term kidney injury, and over the years, her kidney function steadily declined. Two bouts of COVID-19 accelerated the loss, and by 2025, everyday life drained what little energy she had left. "I had maybe 30 minutes of energy a day," she recalls. "I used it to train my horses. That was all I had." She was no longer able to ride.

The prospect of dialysis brought a new emotional weight. She'd been on dialysis for three months in 1995 after Goodpasture syndrome, and she knew she never wanted to return to it. When her nephrologist urged her to begin the transplant process, she acted quickly—researching programs and trying to understand what her future might look like if she could avoid dialysis altogether.

Her husband, Leo Hergenroeder, immediately volunteered to be her living donor. But two major transplant centers rejected him due to minor cardiac abnormalities, despite his cardiologist's reassurance. Situations



Virginia Hergenroeder shares photos of her Corgi dogs with Steven Potter, MD, who also has the same dog breed.

like this are common, as many centers often follow criteria that can rule out otherwise healthy and willing donors. "It felt like we were being dismissed," Virginia says. "We didn't feel like anyone was trying to help us succeed." Still, they kept searching for a place that would look at their case differently.

Their turning point came when they contacted MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute, a center known for evaluating complex cases more comprehensively. From the very first phone call, the experience felt different. "I hung up and told Virginia, 'They were so nice,'" Leo remembers. "It was the first time we felt hope."

Virginia had an immediate connection with her transplant surgeon Steven Potter, MD, after they bonded over their Corgi dogs. "We both pulled

out photos," she laughs. "That's when I knew I was in the right place." Leo was re-evaluated as well, and this time, he was accepted. "Everybody we met was wonderful," Virginia says. "We were treated like people, not problems."

The team explained that while Leo and Virginia were compatible, joining the National Kidney Registry's paired kidney exchange program could offer an even better match. Through this approach, Leo's donation could help another patient, and in return, Virginia would receive the kidney best suited to her medical needs. The program is designed so that one person's generosity helps a stranger while ensuring their loved one receives the most compatible organ possible. Within just one month, it found a donor for Virginia.

continued on the next page



Ashtar Chami, MD

After the kidney donation surgery, Virginia began follow-up care with Ashtar Chami, MD, transplant nephrologist

and associate medical director of kidney transplantation. She watched Virginia's determination with admiration. She remembers how Virginia steadily increased her exercise while preparing for transplant and how that discipline shaped her recovery. "The last time I saw her, she said, 'I got on my horse again.' That's why I went into kidney transplant—to help people return to their normal lives and have a fresh take on life again." The Hergenroeders remain grateful for Dr. Chami's continued excellent care.

Today, Virginia has also regained her energy and is back to creating art and living the life she fought so hard to reclaim. She emphasizes that her outcome came from refusing to give up and finding a care team willing to look at her whole situation. Leo is doing well too, and he feels appreciative for the chance to help Virginia and others through the paired kidney exchange program. "People need to see what's possible," she says. "I'm living proof that people who need a kidney transplant can return to full, active lives."

Why choose MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute?

- **Dual list:** List with us even if you're a patient in another program
- **A leading paired kidney exchange center**
- **One of the highest-volume transplant centers in the U.S.**
- **Leading living donor program with minimally invasive procedures**
- **Short time to transplant**
- **Comprehensive care and support**

If you've been denied acceptance at other transplant programs, you may want to seek a second opinion at MedStar Georgetown.



Leo Hergenroeder, pictured here with Virginia, participated in a paired kidney exchange, so she could receive a more compatible kidney, while his donation helped another recipient.

The latest programs to help increase living donations.

At MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute, there are innovative programs to help increase living donations, including:

Non-directed donation – A non-directed kidney donor donates a kidney without naming a specific recipient. Some non-directed donors initially want to donate to a family member or friend, but the recipient may have another donor or have another reason they cannot move forward with the transplant.

Family voucher program – Provides an opportunity for a non-directed donor to give the gift of life to someone in need of a kidney transplant while assuring their immediate family will be protected should they ever need a transplant in the future. The donor may identify up to five immediate family members.

Eplet matching – An even more precise way to see if a patient “matches” another person. Using the latest technology, recipients may need less immunosuppression medication after transplant, may have fewer complications from antibodies and rejection, and may keep their transplants longer.

Advanced donation program – Allows a donor to donate on a specific date even if the intended paired recipient is not ready for transplant. The intended recipient will receive a kidney when the time is right. This flexibility allows the donor to choose a convenient time for surgery, with the donated kidney going to a recipient in immediate need at that time.

Paired kidney exchange (PKE) – Assists donor and recipient pairs who are incompatible or poorly matched to find another donor and recipient pair or pairs with whom they can exchange kidneys to allow more favorable organ compatibility.

Unique protections for kidney donors.

MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute is the only National Kidney Registry (NKR) Donor Shield Program in Washington, D.C., which means living kidney donors who choose the Institute have access to several important protections, including:



Lost wage reimbursement



Travel and lodging reimbursement

Driving expenses are reimbursed at the IRS mileage rate and lodging covers hotels near MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute.



Life insurance covering a period of one year post-surgery.



Disability insurance maximum for up to 52 weeks post-surgery.



Legal support in the event that a donor's employment or health insurance is negatively affected by living donation.



Coverage for uncovered donor complication costs, which ensures donors are never asked to pay for a post-surgical complication that is a result of their kidney donation.

The program's advantages are available to donors whether they donate directly to their recipient or through an NKR paired kidney exchange (PKE).



How a double transplant helped one man renew his faith and reclaim his life.

Durrell Becton was 17 years old and getting ready to go to college in Ohio when he received the news that he had type 1 diabetes. “It was terrifying,” he remembers. “Probably one of the scariest moments ever. It completely changed my life.”

Although Durrell tried, his diabetes was hard to manage, leading to episodes when his blood sugar swung dangerously low or high. One day shortly after his diagnosis, he was hanging out with friends and became extremely thirsty. But whenever he took a drink, he needed to urinate just a few

minutes later. This continued for about a half hour, then Durrell nearly lost consciousness. His mother rushed him to the hospital, where he discovered his blood sugar was well over 1,000, a life-threatening level.

“For 21 years, I had been living with diabetes, doing my best to manage my blood sugar with insulin. Then, four years ago, I was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease caused by the diabetes, which eventually progressed to kidney failure. That meant I needed to go on peritoneal dialysis, and I was on the machine seven days a week for eight to

nine hours each session. It was very draining, and I wanted to get off dialysis,” says Durrell.

He consulted two MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute specialists: Steven Potter, MD, an experienced kidney and pancreas transplant surgeon, and Sonika Puri, MD, a transplant nephrologist. After an evaluation, Dr. Potter told Durrell he



Sonika Puri, MD

was a candidate for simultaneous deceased donor kidney and pancreas transplantation, where he could receive both organs from the same deceased donor in one surgery rather than in separate procedures. The transplantation of a new pancreas cures the patient's diabetes, and the new kidney replaces the organ damaged by type 1 diabetes, so the patient has normal kidney function.

"I got the best birthday gift ever," says Durrell. "I received a call in the middle of the night from MedStar Georgetown saying they had a kidney/pancreas donor and to come to the hospital the next morning for my transplant surgery."

The transplant was a resounding success. "Durrell had a really great, uneventful post-operative course, like most of our patients. And now he's free

of dialysis. He has good kidney function, and he's off insulin. He no longer has diabetes," explains Dr. Potter. "Here at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital, we have a fantastic team that's extremely experienced. And we do more combined kidney/pancreas transplants than anyone in the country."

Today, Durrell is healthy, back to doing all the things he enjoys, and appreciating every moment.

"My life after transplant has been nothing but gratefulness," he says. "My faith has increased 100-fold. I'm way more appreciative of the little things that I have in life—being able to see, hear, breathe, walk, talk, think—just the basics. The MedStar Georgetown team is awesome. From the initial interview and consultation all the way through the transplant,



Durrell and his fiancée, Beanchor.

everyone has been so helpful and so welcoming. I don't know what's beyond grateful, but that's where I am."

To learn more about the transplant process, visit **MedStarHealth.org/Transplant** or call **202-444-3701**.

Watch Durrell's story at **MedStarHealth.org/Durrell**

Our volumes speak volumes.

MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute is one of the highest volume transplant programs in the United States for liver, kidney, pancreas, small bowel, and multi-organ. We have the largest kidney/pancreas volume and the ninth largest kidney program in the nation.

Scan the QR codes with your smart phone to learn more about the MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute's evaluation process, program details, and resources, plus how you or someone you know can become a living donor.

Request an
evaluation



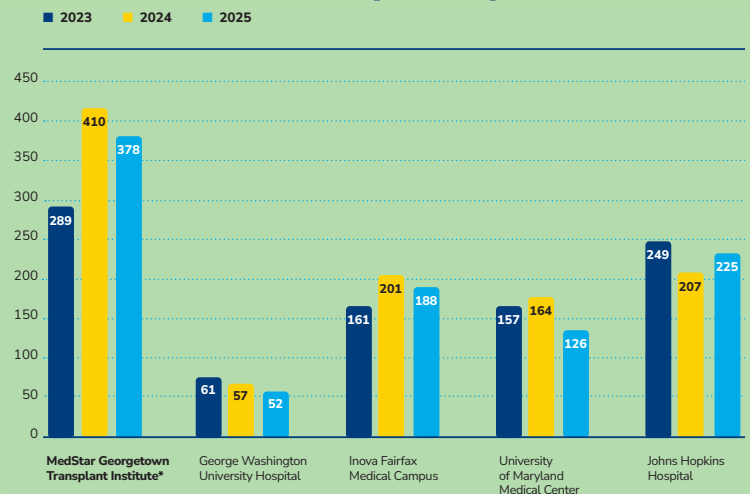
Links to
patient
resources



Become
a Living
Donor



2023 to 2025 kidney transplant volumes.



OPTN.org/data accessed January 2026

*Includes pediatric transplants at DCCH

Local kidney transplant evaluation clinics provide convenient access to national expertise.

New clinic opens at MedStar Franklin Square Medical Center.

New data from the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) verifies what many physicians and patients already know—MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute is home to one of the nation's top transplant programs. In 2025, the Transplant Institute performed 378 kidney transplants, placing it among the top five percent of the highest volume centers in the United States.

Though transplants are done at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, D.C., many of its pre- and post-procedure services are conveniently available to Central Maryland residents at MedStar Franklin Square Medical Center in eastern Baltimore County.

The newly established Kidney Evaluation Clinic provides pre-transplant evaluations, lab tests,



Dr. Naveria Ammad examines a patient at the Kidney Evaluation Clinic at MedStar Franklin Square.

and other assessments to ensure a patient's eligibility, as well as lifelong follow-up services. Nephrologist Naveria Ammad, MD, says, "While all

transplant procedures are performed at MedStar Georgetown, we can eliminate at least two or three pre-op trips to D.C., and more for patients who may

Why choose MedStar Franklin Square Medical Center as your pre- and post-kidney evaluation clinic? We can:

- Offer dual listing, which means that patients can be listed for transplant at a Maryland program and list with MedStar Health to improve access for a quicker transplant.
- Offer protections, such as paired kidney exchange and management of recipients and donors who have incompatible organs or immune-system sensitivity.
- Care for patients with complex conditions that make transplantation more challenging, co-managing bariatric weight management, diabetes, heart disease, and other issues that can delay or prevent the transplant.
- Care for patients who have been turned away by other programs.

Living donations

myths and facts.

require re-evaluations while waiting for a donor organ.” Once a patient is approved for a transplant, the evaluation clinic provides constant communication regarding wait status and any changes that might affect the process.

“With our advanced infrastructure and extensive partnerships, we’re able to transplant a higher number of patients with shorter wait times,” says Dr. Ammad, adding that their high volume of procedures using laparoscopy and other advanced surgical techniques leads to fewer complications and shorter hospital stays.

Transplant patients receive the highest quality of care—regardless of location—all within the MedStar Health family. In addition to MedStar Franklin Square, other kidney evaluation clinics are located at MedStar Washington Hospital Center, MedStar Georgetown University Hospital, and in Fairfax, VA.

For more information on the evaluation clinic at MedStar Franklin Square, visit **MedStarHealth.org/FranklinTransplantEval** or call **202-444-3701**.



MYTHS VS FACTS

MYTH: You must have the same blood type to be able to donate a **kidney** to someone.

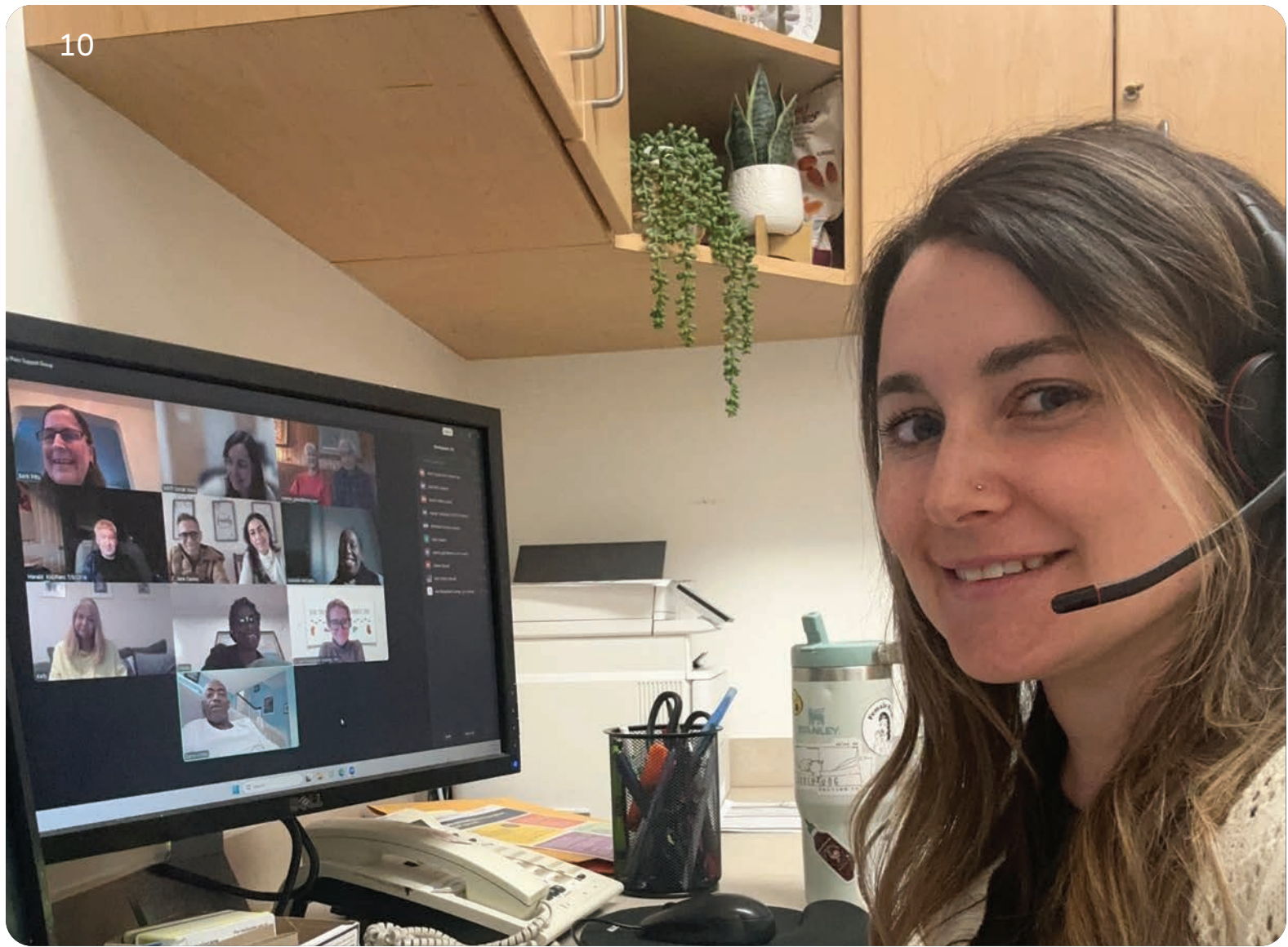
FACT: With the paired kidney exchange program, living donor kidneys are swapped so each recipient receives a compatible organ; therefore, you **don’t** have to be the same blood type to donate a kidney.

MYTH: I won’t be able to maintain an active lifestyle if I donate an organ.

FACT: Living donors can expect to lead normal lives with minimal impact to health and lifestyle.

MYTH: Living donors will be on medication for the rest of their lives.

FACT: Donors do not take any long-term medications after donation.



How social workers walk with patients from first steps through transplant.

Beginning the kidney transplant process can feel overwhelming, especially when you're facing the challenges of treatment and an unknown path ahead. Many patients arrive at their first evaluation carrying not only physical fatigue, but also unspoken worries about what comes next. At MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute, the social work program is designed to meet patients at that moment with compassion and a belief that no one should navigate transplant alone.

One person they may meet early on is Gabrielle "Gabi" Pirro, MSW, LICSW (pictured above). As a pre-kidney

transplant social worker, she is part of a highly skilled and specialized team that guides transplant patients through every stage of evaluation, preparation, and recovery. The team focuses on understanding each patient's life beyond the medical chart by identifying emotional, financial, and practical concerns that, if left unresolved, could affect readiness for surgery.

When patients first meet with a transplant social worker, the conversations are open and supportive, giving them space to talk about concerns they may have been carrying quietly—such as support at home after surgery, medication

costs, or emotional stress. Through these discussions, the team uncovers a wide range of challenges that can look different for every patient.

To manage those challenges, social workers tailor care to the issues that could delay or complicate surgery. Common areas include:

- Identifying caregivers for recovery and follow-up care
- Connecting patients with insurance guidance, food resources, and financial assistance
- Facilitating access to mental health counseling
- Referring patients to substance use treatment when needed
- Addressing barriers to dialysis and medical appointments like transportation
- Securing access to medication assistance and discount programs

As patients progress toward transplant, social workers guide them through the preparation process by answering questions, confirming care plans, and making sure practical needs are addressed before surgery. And their support doesn't end once the transplant is complete. They continue to be a reliable resource for patients and families, helping them navigate emotional changes and adjustments to daily life after the procedure.

In addition to one-on-one engagements, the program offers a Kidney/Pancreas Support Group that links patients and caregivers, promoting ongoing peer connection and encouragement.

Through this ongoing partnership with patients, the social work team witnesses the transformation that unfolds when someone arrives anxious and uncertain, then gradually builds confidence, energy, and a sense of possibility. As Gabi reflects, "Seeing patients regain their lives is why we do this."

If you are beginning or already navigating the transplant process, help is available—and you don't have to figure it out alone. To join the support group or learn more, email Gabi at gabrielle.a.pirro@gunet.georgetown.edu.



Join the virtual Kidney/ Pancreas Support Group

For many, hearing from others who truly understand makes all the difference. Social workers facilitate this gathering virtually on Zoom to help kidney and pancreas patients as well as their caregivers feel connected, informed, and supported.

Who can join

Available to patients awaiting kidney or pancreas transplant, post-transplant patients, and caregivers.

What to expect

Monthly virtual meetings featuring open discussions, peer support, and occasional guest speakers such as dietitians, pharmacists, and mental health professionals.

Why patients find it helpful

Many participants say the group helps them feel less alone and more confident about the transplant journey.



MedStar Health

MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute

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[MedStarHealth.org/Transplant](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Transplant)

P 202-444-3701



Surpassing 10,500 transplants: **impact by organ.**

Pancreas
208



Intestine
385



Kidney and
Pancreas
542



Liver
2,558



Kidney
6,827



Data from OPTN/HRSA as of February 2026

MedStar Georgetown Transplant Institute surgeons have performed more than 10,500 transplants since the Institute's inception in 1987. The team leads the Washington, D.C., region in transplant volume, placing the Institute among the top 10 transplant centers in the nation.

Thomas Fishbein, MD, executive director of the Institute, says, "This milestone shows our long history of helping people get lifesaving care. Each transplant gives patients the chance to live full lives."

To learn more, visit [MedStarHealth.org/Transplant](https://www.MedStarHealth.org/Transplant) or call 202-444-3700.