

## **The Transplant Process from Methodist Hospital Transplant Center/Houston, TX**

### **What to expect**

Like any major life event, the transplant experience can be both difficult and rewarding. You may discover new strengths in yourself as you face the challenge of transplant. Part of this challenge is to learn to recognize when you are going through difficult times, and to ask for help from your significant others and members of the transplant team. Although it is not problem-free, the hope of transplantation is to help you enjoy a longer and healthier life. Let us help you realize that hope.

There are five phases in the transplant experience. It is important to remember that you and your family member will go through these phases in your own way.

### **Phase I: The evaluation period\***

During the first phase, the evaluation period, you will undergo a series of tests and procedures, some of which may be unpleasant. You may have just learned that you need a transplant. You will feel frightened and anxious or you may feel relief if you have been searching for a treatment for an illness that has lasted for a long time and has only gotten worse with time.

### **Phase II: The waiting period**

The second part of transplantation, the waiting period, may be the hardest part of your journey, as you and your family feel as if your life is "put on hold." It is important to try to maintain a normal routine and live life to the fullest during this time. Your health may be declining, but you can help take care of yourself by taking medications as prescribed, keeping medical appointments and staying as physically active as possible. You will face adjustments as every area of your life is affected by the possibility of a transplant. Others may take on duties that you can no longer carry out. Financial changes are likely as medical expenses increase and you may no longer be able to work.

### **Phase III: The day of the surgery**

The third phase of the transplant experience is finally here. The day of surgery can make you feel both happy and fearful. It may be difficult for your family and loved ones who are waiting during the long hours of surgery. The transplant coordinator will be there to help you with questions and concerns. The medical staff will want your family to choose one person to communicate information about your condition.

### **Phase IV: The hospital stay**

Your recovery process begins with your stay in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and the hospital. Physical and emotional "ups and downs" are common during the hospital stay. Use caution when you compare yourself too closely to other transplant patients, because every patient's experience will be different.

### **Phase V: Getting on with your life**

Finally you are ready to leave the hospital. Getting on with your life can be frightening. The hospital can feel like a very safe place. There will be many changes in your life and new responsibilities for your health. You will be taking medications and seeing your doctor for the rest of your life. However, you will also be discovering more energy as your health improves. You may return to work and other activities that are important to you. Sometimes, as your life becomes more normal, old issues may come up that you now want to deal with. Although transplantation is stressful, it can also be an opportunity for personal growth and bringing families closer.

### **Other psychosocial issues**

Additional issues may affect you during the transplant experience. Having a chronic illness causes physical and emotional changes that can affect many areas of life, including sexuality. Changes can take place in hormones, circulation, nerve functioning and energy level. These changes may lower sexual interest and/or sexual ability. Physical changes may cause people with chronic illness to feel less attractive sexually. The use of steroids may cause weight gain, acne and unwanted hair growth or loss. Surgical scars can cause you to feel unattractive.

## **Relaxation as a way of coping with stress**

Your social worker can assist you with teaching ways of coping with the stress of a serious illness. Techniques such as relaxation, mental imaging, etc., can be helpful. Remember that these techniques are skills, and skills improve with practice.

## **Vocational rehabilitation**

As a transplant patient, getting back to life involves regaining your health, maintaining a positive outlook and having meaningful personal relationships. For you, your job may be what makes you feel useful.

After your transplant, you may not be able to return to previous employment or may not be able to work full-time. There are programs that can help you find, keep or change your job. For example, your state's vocational rehabilitation program can assist you. Counselors help you to determine career interest and abilities. The purpose of state vocational rehabilitation is to help handicapped individuals who have physical or mental disabilities secure and maintain jobs. A medical release is required from your doctor to participate in this program.

## **\*Types of tests**

There are a variety of tests that you will be required to take as you are evaluated for transplant. Based on age and test results, other tests may be needed. Be sure you know the test requirements as you plan your day at the center.

Blood work: CBC, full chemistries, serologies (HIV, hepatitis, etc.) sputum cultures, blood and tissue typing, kidney function

Chest x-ray & CT of chest and sinus: looking for infection and any disease processes

Abdominal and renal ultrasound: looking for gall stones or abnormalities of kidneys

Barium swallow: swallowing capabilities and abnormalities of the esophagus

Bone mineral density exam, Whole body bone scan, Lumbar sacral spine x-ray: bone loss or degeneration

Dental x-rays: looking for abscesses or cavities—a dental check up is recommended

VQ scan: ventilation and perfusion scan that compares the blood flow and the air flow in the lungs

Mammogram: you may be asked to bring in old films for comparison (ladies only)

EKG: electrical activity of your heart

Echo with doppler: measures heart function and of the carotid artery for blockages

Dobutamine Thallium Stress Test: with use of medication, induces stress in heart to measure blood flow

Pulmonary function tests: breathing tests that show lung function—will be repeated throughout waiting time and post-transplant

Heart catheterization: right or left or none at all based on what doctors recommend

Biopsies & bronchoscopy: usually after transplant to look for rejection, but may be indicated sooner.

## **Types of Patient and Family Education Classes**

Nutrition, Exercise, Psychosocial Issues, Financial Issues, Infection, Rejection, Your transplant and after, Diabetes Education

*\*Material from Methodist Hospital Transplant Center and website. PHA Conference 2008: Considering Transplant Patient Session*