

## ► Broadening Organ Sources To Transplant More Patients

Organ transplant centers are gradually winning the battle to make more organs available to more patients. The ability to use hepatitis C-positive organs, broader and more effective organ-sharing systems, and the expanding option of living-donor organs are all improving the capability to respond to an ever-growing waiting list of recipients.

“With these factors and our wider criteria, both geographically and otherwise, for obtaining organs—and our ability to perform complex cases with complicated vascular aspects to them—we have been able to increase our volume of organ transplantation and save more lives,” said Ely Sebastian, MD, chief of transplant surgery at Virtua.

### Care for Continuum of Organ Disease Stages

The Virtua Advanced Transplant & Organ Health service delivers a full continuum of care, across every stage of kidney, liver, and pancreas disease—aligning Virtua’s existing transplant, nephrology, and hepatology programs to provide optimally coordinated organ care for patients. Virtua is also the only provider of transplantation for these three organs in South Jersey. Services include advanced care for a variety of liver disorders, such as liver cancer, hepatitis C, and fatty liver disease, and kidney conditions such as chronic kidney disease and end-stage renal disease, as well as a dedicated hepatobiliary/pancreas team offering complex reconstruction as well as pancreatectomy for tumors benign or malignant. The team also provides AV fistula creation and access for dialysis patients.

In addition to taking on difficult surgical cases, the service features: paired exchange; simultaneous kidney-pancreas or liver-kidney transplant; laparoscopic donor nephrectomy; and long-term follow-up of organ recipients and living donors.

“With our team’s long success at living kidney donor cases, we are hoping to add living-donor liver transplants within the

next one to three years,” said Virtua transplant hepatologist Nyan Latt, MD.

### Expanded Care Capacity

With seamless transitioning of suitable patients to the transplant program and a successful COVID-19 protocol, the Virtua transplant service performed the most transplants in its 47-year history last year. It was able to qualify more organs, including through use of direct-acting antivirals for HCV+ organs. Virtua has also taken full advantage of multiple listing through the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) and aggressively pursues donor organs from farther distances—all the while meeting and exceeding the national standard benchmarks for expected patient and graft outcomes, and Medicare outcome requirements.

With offices in Cherry Hill, Mount Laurel, Northfield, Toms River, Voorhees, Camden, Linwood, and Washington Township, the team of nephrologists, hepatologists, transplant surgeons, nurse practitioners/PAs, social workers, and pre- and post-transplant coordinators, as well as transplant pharmacists, dietitians, and finance coordinators, remains accessible to patients and referring physicians throughout the process.

“We are gratified that more physicians and dialysis centers are aware of our service and our expanded capacity so that we can help more patients and get them into care right away for organ disease,” said Dr. Sebastian.



To refer a patient to Virtua Advanced Transplant & Organ Health and for the latest outcomes data:

- Kidney and pancreas - 856-796-9370
- Liver - 856-796-9340
- Post-transplant, fistula creation/access, hepatobiliary - 856-757-3840

## A Rare Capability: Restoring Kidney Function through Autotransplant

Renal autotransplant is an operation in which a transplant team removes a patient's kidney to address the organ's issues and reimplant it. With the kidney removed, the surgeons may correct certain defects in the organ, and will then reconstruct and re-establish often-compromised vascular and urologic connections as part of returning the kidney to a new position in the pelvis, with restored function. This procedure, which can spare patients dialysis or need for transplant, remains rare, primarily because few hospitals around the world perform it, due to its complexity.

"Many more patients could be benefitting from this procedure if more centers offered it," said Virtua's Nasser Youssef, MD, who leads his transplant team's capability in this treatment, as one of the few surgeons in the country with expertise to perform renal autotransplant.

Patients in need of this surgery include those with:

- A kidney that has vascular or ureter malformations or anomalies such as stenoses or strictures, or a short or injured ureter
- Intractable stone disease or kidney injuries from stone extraction or trauma
- Loin pain hematuria syndrome
- Renal aneurysm or tumor

These patients may have undergone multiple stenting of the renal artery and/or may have long-lasting kidney or ureter pain that has not improved with other treatments. Candidates for this procedure often have an adequately healthy kidney that is decreasing in function, with danger of losing the kidney or its capacity altogether.

Renal autotransplant begins with laparoscopic nephrectomy. The team cools and perfuses the organ, corrects the organ's physical issues (which may include removal of lesions), and then transplants the organ back into the patient's pelvis, often closer to the bladder with shortening of the ureter—all through use of hand-assisted laparoscopy. Challenges come in remaking the organ's vascular connections. Sometimes this requires creating a renal artery bypass or new renal artery, for example, with a saphenous vein, or connection to the iliac artery, as well as other intricate steps. Immuno-suppression, of course, is not needed afterwards.

**“ More specialists need to know about this...because otherwise these patients will usually end up on dialysis. ”**

— Nasser Youssef, MD

Vascular and thoracic surgeons often refer patients to Virtua from afar due to the rarity of the capability.

"More specialists need to know about this alternative therapy, because otherwise these patients will usually end up on dialysis," said Dr. Youssef. "After a renal autotransplant, our patients typically enjoy a return to healthy function from their kidney with normal creatinine."



Specialists remove the kidney and correct defects before reimplanting it in the patient's abdomen.

**To refer a patient for renal autotransplant, call 856-757-3840.**