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Lawyer finds no objection to transplant

By Jessica Cooley, Cox East Texas

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

LUFKIN — A Lufkin lawyer diagnosed with a life-threatening kidney disease received the gift of life from an unlikely source — a Longview lawyer he's faced in more than 4,000 cases in the past five years.

During a life insurance physical three years ago, lab results revealed that Scott Skelton had IgA nephropathy, an autoimmune disease that can cause kidney failure.



Special to the News-Journal
(ENLARGE)

Keith Langston of Longview, right, donated a kidney to fellow lawyer Scott Skelton of Lufkin. Both "I wanted to give Scott and my donated organ the best chance possible, and that meant acting quickly to keep him off of dialysis," Langston said. "He wouldn't have made it another two weeks."

Around Thanksgiving, it became clear Skelton would be among the 25 percent of IgA patients needing either a transplant or lifetime dialysis.

"I was obviously scared and concerned, but I wasn't devastated because I knew that people can live full and fruitful lives with dialysis, but it would be a lifestyle change," Skelton said. "I wasn't happy, but you go through an adjustment period and then move to the next step."

Patients who go through dialysis before getting a donor kidney have an increased risk of rejection and other complications. Skelton's family members and friends got tested in hopes of being the match Skelton needed for a live donation, in which one kidney is taken from a donor and transplanted into the recipient. Live donations have a 90 percent success rate; taking an organ from a deceased donor has an 80 percent success rate, according to the Kidney Foundation's Web site.

A lawyer with Keith Langston's Longview firm found out Skelton needed a transplant. Skelton and Langston had been friends and colleagues for years, but he did not know Skelton's kidneys were failing.

"Keith called me one day and said, 'I hear you need a kidney — I want to donate one,'" Skelton said. "I never dreamed that he would be the one to offer me a kidney. It just goes to show that it pays to make friends in all walks of life."

After a whirlwind of tests, Langston gave Skelton a kidney Feb. 12 — in the same Dallas hospital where Skelton was born. Skelton and Langston each spent about two hours on the operating table.

"I don't think many people realize this, but the donor surgery is done laparoscopically now with the exception of removing the kidney," Langston said. "I have four puncture wounds and a three-inch incision line."

Skelton awoke in recovery room feeling energized and ready to focus on getting his life back.

"My recovery has been remarkable," Skelton said. "Just two days post-op my labs were normal for someone my age and size."

Both men are doing well. Langston returned to work this week, and Skelton has been released from the hospital and will be staying in a Dallas apartment for the next few weeks to make his frequent trips to the doctor more manageable. Skelton has even been working on cases.

"Since surgery, Keith and I have talked about cases," Skelton said. "We work together every day."

As soon as the men fully recover, they want to work together to become advocates for live donation. Both made the decision long ago to be listed as organ donors, but neither imagined they would be involved in a live donation.

"There are 80,000 people on the kidney donor list, and we could wipe that list out through live donation," Langston said. "I want people to know that it only takes five or six days to help someone live a full and happy life."

Skelton said that because he has always been listed as an organ donor, he is comfortable with receiving a kidney from Langston.

"I can still be a donor, just not my kidneys," Skelton said.

"If you die and you're no longer here on earth, why not give someone the gift of life?"

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