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Organ donation gives pair new lease on life



Jason Pacheco of Georgetown and Sara Murray of Acton, who both have cystic fibrosis, recently underwent double lung transplants and hope to raise awareness of the importance of organ donation. The two are pictured here with some of the many pills they have to take daily and an organ donor card.

Photo by Ted Brown

Double lung recipients hope their story will inspire others to sign organ donor cards

"Please don't take your organs to Heaven, Heaven knows we need them here," is the message emblazoned on one of Sara Murray's well-worn T-shirts.

Those words have special meaning for Murray who has first-hand knowledge of the importance of organ donation. About two months ago the 26-year-old Acton woman underwent a double lung transplant.

Her mother, Pam Murray, said if donor lungs had not been available for her daughter, she likely would not be here today.

Both Sara, and 23-year-old Jason Pacheco of Georgetown, who also recently had a double lung transplant, are grateful to the organ donors and their families, who they say have given them a second chance at life. They hope their stories will inspire others to become donors also.

"It will help a lot of people," said Pacheco who urges people to sign their organ and tissue donor cards.

"It's not even just signing your donor card, it's telling your family and making your wishes known," said Murray. "So at the time, when something awful does happen, they don't have to make the decision because they know what you want."

It was cystic fibrosis (CF), a fatal inherited disease Pacheco and Murray both suffer from, that caused their need for donor lungs.

CF sufferers have severe breathing problems caused by a build-up of thick mucus that makes it difficult to clear bacteria and leads to cycles of infection and inflammation, which damages the delicate lung tissues.

Just days before she received her lung transplant Murray had become very ill, and had to be hospitalized at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. Her pulmonary function test showed her lungs were functioning at only 10 to 12 per cent, a long way from the 30 per cent mark that she said indicates a two-year or less survival rate.

"Over a weekend I went from maintaining, to I couldn't even breathe. My lungs crashed," she said.

One night in hospital Murray said her breathing was so laboured she "actually thought that was the night I was going to die."

A surgeon from Toronto General Hospital's transplant team rushed over to see the young woman and Murray officially signed for the transplant.

"They were worried that I didn't have much time," said Murray. She said she was bumped to the top of the list and 15 days later, at 4:45 a.m. a nurse woke her to tell her they had her lungs.

She was rushed by ambulance to Toronto General

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