



The Paired Exchange Conundrum

Imagine the frustration of having a kidney donor who is willing and healthy enough to donate but they not compatible with you. This happens to approximately 30% of potential donors.

As a result of medical technology and better anti-rejection drugs, paired exchanges, (also called swaps or chains), allow these incompatible donors to help their intended recipient by donating to another recipient who also has an incompatible donor. In short, these two recipients swap their incompatible donors. (I've used two pairs for this example but many pairs could and have benefited.) Paired exchanges have the potential of increasing kidney transplants by thousands a year if a centralized national program is developed that will register all incompatible pairs. The likelihood of being matched with another incompatible pair is increased when there are many incompatible pairs within your pool. When you agree to pursue a Paired Exchange you should ask, how long an incompatible pair similar to you and your donor had to wait to be paired up with another incompatible pair in that pool. This information should be available.

The Conundrum

Unlike the waiting list for a deceased donor kidney, there isn't one national Paired Exchange program that has all incompatible pairs listed. There are many lists of incompatible pairs. Here are the different types of Paired Exchange programs that have developed:

1. If your transplant hospital has a Paired Exchange program then they will try to match you with the other incompatible pairs that they have registered at their hospital.
2. Some hospitals share some or all of their incompatible pairs with other local hospitals or ones in different parts of the U.S.
3. Hospitals, i.e. Mayo Clinic has many transplant centers in different markets and they share their information within those hospitals.
4. There are three national organizations that don't do transplants but they have developed a "co-op" type relationship with many hospitals. To get registered with one of these "co-op" organizations you need to register with one of their affiliates. Keep in mind, that an affiliate hospital is not required to share all of their incompatible pairs. If you register at one of the "co-op" organizations you must confirm with your center that they have registered you with your intended "co-op".
5. You can register with multiple hospitals for a paired exchange and with multiple "co-op" organizations. Before looking into registering with other hospitals you need to check you're your insurance. They may not cover you at another hospital. Those with Medicare are covered at all transplant hospitals.

Here's a list of the three "co-op" organizations: (National Kidney Registry is doing more paired exchanges than the other two groups.) *

Alliance for Paired Donation - www.paireddonation.org

Alliance affiliated centers - www.paireddonation.org/transplant-center/

National Kidney Registry - www.kidneyregistry.org

NKR affiliated centers - <http://kidneytransplantcenters.org/center/index>

UNOS - www.transplantpro.org

UNOS affiliated centers - www.unos.org/wp-content/uploads/unos/OPTNKPDPCCentersByState.pdf

What You Should Know and Action You Can Take

You should ask if your hospital is involved with other Paired Exchange programs and whether they share all of their incompatible pairs. Some hospitals will keep the pairs that are easy to match and offer the more difficult pairs to their exchange member(s). This is not an efficient way of maximizing Paired Exchange programs.

Be aware that the three national "co-op" organizations, evaluate pairs anonymous. Only an ID # identifies the patient. That is not necessarily the case when a transplant center is matching you up with other incompatible pairs within their center. The committee(s) that evaluates paired exchange candidates could be the same doctors that care for these patients. Knowing the identity of the patients could work in your favor or against you.

You could ask your transplant center the criteria they use for "matching" pairs and who is on the selection committee. It is helpful to know, but you might be told this information is not available.

Here's what you could do to maximize your chances of being matched with another incompatible pair:

1. Register with your original transplant hospital's Paired Exchange program.
2. Find hospitals that participate with one or more of the three national "co-op" programs as described in #5 above.
3. There are transplant centers that have Paired Exchange programs that are not affiliated with any of the three "co-op" organizations. You could register at these transplant centers too.

Registering with many Paired Exchange programs may not be easy, but it will increase the odds of being matched with another incompatible pair.

For a more detailed description of Paired exchanges [click here](#) or go to:
www.lkdn.org/LKDN_Paired_Exchanges.pdf

*Living Kidney Donors Network does not have a relationship with any paired exchange program.

Harvey Mysel is a 2-time kidney transplant recipient and Founder of the Living Kidney Donors Network, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that offers workshops, webcasts and private consultation that educates people in need of a kidney transplant about living kidney donation and helps prepare them to effectively communicate their need to family members and friends. You can follow the Living Kidney Donors Network on their Facebook page and website. Harvey could be reached at: harvey@LKDN.org

Living Kidney Donors Network
a Nonprofit 501(c)3 Organization
Phone 312-473-3772 Fax 312-238-8621
info@LKDN.org www.LKDN.org <http://www.facebook.com/LivingKidneyDonorsNetwork>