



## The Paired Exchange Conundrum

Imagine the frustration of having a kidney donor who is willing and healthy enough to donate but they are not compatible with you. This happens often, up to 50% of approved donors are not able to donate to their recipient.

As a result of medical technology, better anti-rejection drugs and [paired exchanges](#), (also called swaps or chains), these incompatible donors are able 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, there could be many pairs in a paired exchange.) Paired exchanges have already increased the number of living kidney transplants by more than 1,000 a year and have the potential of increasing the number by many thousands more a year. One of the barriers is that a centralized national program needs to include **ALL** incompatible pairs. The likelihood of being matched with another incompatible pair is increased when there is a large pool of incompatible pairs.

### The Conundrum

Unlike the waiting list for a deceased donor kidney, there isn't one national paired exchange program that lists **ALL** incompatible pairs. Here are the different types of paired exchange programs that have been developed:

1. If your transplant hospital has a paired exchange program then they will try to match you with the other incompatible pairs that are 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 have transplant centers in different markets and they share their information within those hospitals.
4. There are three national paired exchange organizations, Alliance for Paired Donation, National Kidney Registry and the UNOS Paired Exchange Program. These organizations have developed a "co-op" type relationship with many transplant centers. These centers list their incompatible pairs with one or more "co-op." To register with one of the paired exchange programs, an incompatible pair needs to register with one of their affiliates.
5. You can register with multiple centers for a paired exchange and with multiple "co-op" organizations. With private health insurance, you need to check to make sure you are covered at other hospitals. Those with Medicare are covered at all transplant hospitals.

Alliance for Paired Donation - [www.paireddonation.org](http://www.paireddonation.org)

Alliance affiliated centers - [www.paireddonation.org/transplant-center/](http://www.paireddonation.org/transplant-center/)

National Kidney Registry - [www.kidneyregistry.org](http://www.kidneyregistry.org)

NKR affiliated centers – [www.kidneytransplantcenters.org/center/index](http://www.kidneytransplantcenters.org/center/index)

UNOS - [www.transplantpro.org](http://www.transplantpro.org)

UNOS affiliated centers - [www.unos.org/wp-content/uploads/unos/OPTNKPDPCCentersByState.pdf](http://www.unos.org/wp-content/uploads/unos/OPTNKPDPCCentersByState.pdf)

You should ask if your hospital is involved with one or more of the “co-op” programs. 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 exchanges.

The three national “co-op” organizations, evaluate pairs anonymously. When a transplant center is matching you 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.

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

1. Register with your original transplant center’s paired exchange program.
2. If your center is not affiliated with one of the “co-op” organizations find hospitals that are affiliated.
3. Research which paired exchange “co-op” is doing the most transplants and get listed in that program first.

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](http://www.lkdn.org/LKDN_Paired_Exchanges.pdf)

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