**National Minority Donor Awareness Month**

Stories of Hope, August 2025

**Lisa, heart recipient**

After a career in the military, serving four years in the Air Force and nine years in the Army, Lisa decided not to reenlist. At her discharge exam in 2017, she received some startling news about her heart that eventually led to her needing a pacemaker and then an ICD. Lisa continued to quietly struggle with daily activities until 2023, when one day she could barely walk and her family rushed her to the hospital. She was placed on the transplant waiting list in July and, in August, received her lifesaving gift of a new heart. Lisa's family played a crucial role in her recovery – for months, different family members took turns sleeping in her living room, preparing her meals, and driving her to appointments. Slowly but surely, she was able to walk down the street, and eventually, she was able to climb the steps to her house without help. Thanks to the generosity of a donor and their family, Lisa is two years post-transplant and looks forward to more milestones along her journey.

**Priya, kidney recipient**

"This is not my story. This is our story. It's not only about me but my family, too. They helped me get where I am today. Because of the person who donated their organ, I get to live a healthier life, and I get to bring life to this earth." In 2013, Priya received her gift of a new kidney from an anonymous donor after spending the previous seven years on hemodialysis. Her condition started young, having her first surgery at 12 years old and her second a few years later to remove one of her damaged kidneys. When she was 21 years old, her condition worsened, and she was added to the kidney transplant waiting list. She was also diagnosed with congestive heart failure and was added to the transplant list for her heart.

The kidney transplant she received in 2013 changed everything. “I never had so much energy before. I’m perfect. I never felt so healthy, because I’ve always been sick, always been having pain.” Priya was finally able to pursue her dream of acting and modeling, and six years after her transplant, she gave birth to her son, Austin, with her husband, Sanjay. To treat the congestive heart failure, doctors implanted a defibrillator and pacemaker, which has helped stabilize her heart enough to take her off the transplant list, and Priya said that her heart condition improved after the transplant. Today, Priya lives a healthy life and volunteers with New England Donor Services to help spread the message of registering as a donor.

**Dr. Clive Callender, spotlight**

Born in New York City in 1936, Dr. Clive Callender decided at seven that he wanted to pursue a career in medicine. In 1969, Dr. Callendar joined the faculty of Howard University School of Medicine. In 1974, he founded the Howard University Hospital Transplant Center, a first among historically black medical schools. He became only the 3rd African American transplant surgeon in the country at that time. With the mission of enhancing organ donation awareness and reducing the number of patients awaiting transplant in minority communities, he founded the National Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program (MOTTEP) in 1992. Today, Dr. Callender is still an active educator at Howard University.

**Ezequiel and Iris, donor family**

In September 2011, Ezequiel’s son, Rey, passed away in a motorcycle accident. A beloved teacher and coach, Rey became a tissue donor – his corneas, heart valves, and bone tissue helped heal others' lives. For Ezequiel and his wife, Iris, the decision to say “yes” to donation remains one of the most important their family has ever made. Inspired by his son’s generosity and driven to keep his spirit alive, Ezequiel ran his first-ever 5K at age 67 and has continued to complete close to 100 races.

Ezequiel and Iris, both born in Puerto Rico, have lived in Newark, NJ, since 1971 and spent their careers in education. Today, they are volunteers for NJ Sharing Network, raising awareness about donation, especially within local Hispanic communities. They frequently speak at churches, community events, and on Spanish-language media, helping to break down myths and promote lifesaving facts.

“People respond better when they hear something in their language. There’s a level of trust and connection that’s built when we speak from the heart in a way that truly resonates with our community. Iris and I have spoken to so many people who carry deep fears and misconceptions–some believe they’re too old to be donors, others worry that if they register, doctors won’t work as hard to save them in an emergency. These myths can be dangerous and prevent lives from being saved. We are here to change that by sharing the truth, educating families, and showing them that donation is a powerful and selfless act of love.”

**Makenna, cornea recipient**

Makenna suffered from chronic ulcers in her right eye, resulting in scars that gradually damaged her eyesight. It was determined that a transplant was her best option, and she has since received two cornea transplants, which granted her the gift to see again. “It’s the kindness and selflessness that it takes for a stranger to grant other people the opportunity to experience this gift. It definitely changed the way my family views organ donation, and it’s something they advocate heavily for.”

**Marina and Joana, mother-daughter living kidney donor and recipient**

When 14-year-old Joana’s life was turned upside down by end-stage renal failure, her mother, Marina, stepped forward without hesitation. In 2013, Marina donated a kidney to her daughter, sparking nine years of thriving life for Joana despite initial challenges and rejection scares. When Joana’s health declined again in 2022, the family's resilience was once again tested. After enduring dialysis and open-heart surgery, Joana received a second kidney transplant in 2024, this time from her aunt.

Throughout their journey, Marina and Joana realized the importance of family and community support. Together, they founded a nonprofit dedicated to educating and supporting families in their local area who are impacted by kidney disease.

**Dr. Velma Scantlebury-White, spotlight**

As we close out National Minority Donor Awareness Month, we honor the lifesaving work of Dr. Velma Scantlebury-White, the first Black woman to become a transplant surgeon in the United States. Over her 40-year-long career, Dr. Scantlebury-White performed an estimated 2,000 organ transplants.

Born in Barbados, she and her family immigrated to Brooklyn, New York, when she was 15. Pursuing her dream of becoming a physician, she eventually earned her medical degree from Columbia University. Eight years later, Dr. Scantlebury-White earned her Doctor of Surgery from Pitt School of Medicine, a first in the country. Recognized as one of the top doctors in the U.S., Dr. Scantlebury-White is passionate about educating communities of color about the need for more organ donors and the rising number of patients in need of transplantation.