A Leader in Transplantation
Since the University of Wisconsin Transplant Program began in 1966, it has been a national leader in the field of transplantation. The UW Health Transplant Program was a pioneer in reduced-liver transplants for children and first began to perform reduced-liver transplants in 1989. In 1999, our team performed its first adult-to-adult live-donor liver transplant.

The UW Health Transplant Program has gained international recognition through clinical expertise, education and scientific research. The program’s strong commitment to basic and applied research has placed the program at the forefront of medical technology and has helped the UW Health Transplant Program to continually improve the care and outcomes for transplant patients.

Cover photo: Sam donated part of his liver to his daughter, Aviva.
Need for Living Liver Donation
Currently, more than 16,000 people in the nation are waiting for a liver transplant, according to the United Network of Organ Sharing (UNOS), unos.org. The most severely ill patients are placed at the top of the list. This means patients with less severe disease have to become sicker before receiving a transplant. Living donation offers patients the opportunity to receive a transplant sooner.

Advantages to Having a Living Donor
- Scheduled surgery, making it more convenient for patients and their families.
- Decreased waiting time allows patients to return to a better quality of life in a much shorter time period, reducing the risk of progressing to more severe liver disease.
- The liver is transplanted into the recipient immediately after the donor surgery, which helps preserve liver function and reduce complications.
- Improved survival compared to remaining on the transplant wait list.

Donor Eligibility
Through the medical miracle of living donor liver transplantation, the donor and recipient do not have to be blood-related. Any healthy person can give a friend or relative the gift of life. Potential donors should be in relatively good health, both physically and emotionally.

Donor Screening
A review of the donor candidate’s overall health will be completed and blood samples will be drawn to test compatibility with the recipient. If the donor is found to be in good health and the blood testing demonstrates compatibility, a medical evaluation of the donor will be completed. This evaluation is done at the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics. Our staff carefully reviews each individual patient’s situation to determine whether a potential living donor is a suitable candidate. Certain pre-existing conditions such as advanced age, heart disease, cancer or other diseases could make a candidate ineligible for donation. Potential living-liver donors receive counseling to ensure they understand the risks associated with surgery, hospitalization and recovery.

Risks for a Living Donor
While the results of living-donor liver transplantation throughout the world are very good, the procedure is not without risk to the donor. Risks for any surgical procedure include the use of general anesthesia, possible bleeding, wound healing, infection, and complications after surgery such as blood clots. Risks specific to living liver donation include the risk of liver injury or bile duct complications.

Donor Costs
The recipient’s insurance pays for the donor’s medical expenses for the donor testing, surgery, hospitalization and surgical follow-up. Travel costs and time away from work are not often covered by insurance and need to be considered. In the State of Wisconsin, a donor may subtract up to $10,000 from their federal adjusted gross income for these costs on their state income tax form. An employee of the State of Wisconsin is also eligible for 30 days paid leave of absence for the donation of a solid organ. A potential donor should check with their employer to see if there is a policy offering paid leave of absence for donation.

Donor Care after Surgery
During recovery, the donor will be seen for follow-up care at the UW Health Transplant clinic approximately two to three weeks after donation and approximately one year and two years following donation. After that, as with all individuals, it is good to obtain routine annual medical examinations. There are no dietary restrictions, physical restrictions or lifelong medications associated with being a living-liver donor.

Living Donor Mentor Program
The Living Donor Mentor Program links people who have donated an organ with those who are considering living donation. A mentor can be a valuable source of support, encouragement and information. Mentors have various backgrounds which allows potential donors to be matched to a mentor best suited to them.

If you would like further information on the mentor program, please call (608) 261-0516.

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