



Christopher Sonnenday, M.D., M.H.S.

## The Director's Corner

### Insights and Advancements in Transplantation

January 2024

Dear Colleagues,

In Japanese culture, the concept of *igikai* is described as the conversion of passion, talent, hard work, and value to society that gives an individual a sense of purpose. Studies have demonstrated that individuals with a higher sense of *igikai* live longer lives and have fewer stress-related illnesses such as cardiovascular disease. We all define for ourselves what gives us purpose, but certainly one pathway to is to do meaningful work. The work we are privileged to do in transplantation transforms and restores lives through shepherding the most precious gift of organ donation. As we begin 2024, it is important to pause and reflect on contributions of the past year and the meaning of our work.

We are completing the busiest year in the history of our Transplant Center. A few of the many achievements of the past year are summarized below:

- **Lives Transformed** – we performed 491 transplants in 2023, our busiest year ever (previously 463 in 2006).
  - Our adult kidney program had its busiest year in our history – 307 kidney transplants (in 2022 there were 14 transplant centers in the US that did 300 or more kidney transplants).
  - Our adult heart program had its busiest year in our history – 37 heart transplants.
  - Our adult liver transplant program had its busiest year in 17 years – 89 liver transplants.
  - Our pediatric heart transplant program had its second busiest year in history – 20 pediatric heart transplants.
  - Our total pediatric transplant volume is 46 transplants – the most in a year in our history.
- **Hope Restored** – as we know for many patients the biggest barrier to transplant is actually making it to a transplant center. This year our programs handled over 4,800 referrals, by far the busiest year in our history reflecting more than 60% growth in referrals over the past 10 years. These referrals have led thus far to 685 waitlist additions across all programs, the most at our Center in 17 years. I would call out specifically the dedication of our pre-transplant teams who have handled this increased demand for transplant.
- **Striving Towards Equity** – our adult kidney transplant waitlist management team took on the massive workload of finding old records for all of our listed Black patients to allow them to have their estimated GFR corrected in a race-inclusive calculation, restoring additional waiting time owed to these patients and facilitated by UNOS/OPTN policy ([https://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/media/eempkchs/policy-notice\\_egfrwtmods\\_mac\\_ki.pdf](https://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/media/eempkchs/policy-notice_egfrwtmods_mac_ki.pdf)).



Christopher Sonnenday, M.D., M.H.S.

## The Director's Corner

### Insights and Advancements in Transplantation

This tedious work required finding documentation of laboratory tests done years ago and led to some of our patients obtaining waiting time they deserved of more than 5-10 years. To date this effort has directly led to the transplant this year of more than 40 Black patients who had additional waiting time restored that increased their kidney allocation score.

- **Embracing Innovation** – the adult heart program performed the first DCD heart transplant in the state of Michigan, facilitated by the use of normothermic machine perfusion (NMP) to preserve and resuscitate donor organs. Between the liver and heart programs, we performed more than 45 transplants this year facilitated by the use of NMP. These are 45 organs we would have not utilized with conventional preservation. Our preservation team worked this year with multiple partners across the institution to create our own NMP program in house, utilizing the OrganOx device which has already facilitated 5 liver transplants in the last month.
- **Financial Stewardship** – we are committed to prudent fiscal stewardship and strategic decision-making at a time when the resources required in transplantation have become more complex and costly than ever before. Improved financial transparency has enabled sound institutional investment in our organ programs to support improved access, adoption of emerging technologies, and growth.

I have never been prouder to be part of the Transplant Center, not just because of the magnitude of the work done, but because of the way our teams have done that work. From the front desk to our dedicated MAs, across all providers and teams, to our administrative and finance teams, I have repeatedly seen them put the patient first regardless of circumstances.

With the start of the new year, we look forward to continuing our collaboration with you as we care for all patients in need of transplantation.

Sincerely,

Christopher Sonnenday, M.D., M.H.S.  
The Darrell A. Campbell, Jr, M.D., Collegiate Professor of Transplant Surgery  
Director, U-M Health Transplant Center