

Transplant a milestone for Allentown woman, LVH ** Judith Atiyeh, whose kidneys stopped working in 2004, is the first to get a child's organs.

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No. 13 proved the charm for an Allentown woman awaiting a kidney transplant for more than a year. It also proved a historic event for Lehigh Valley Hospital.

After getting her hopes dashed a dozen times before, 63-year-old Judith Atiyeh answered a call recently that gave her two kidneys -- both from a 2-year-old accident victim.

The July 25 operation made Atiyeh the first LVH-Cedar Crest patient to receive two kidneys at once during the transplant program's 15-year history. It also marked the first time LVH's surgeons had transplanted a child's kidney into an adult.

"Thirteen was lucky for me," Atiyeh said. "A lot of times the [previous] kidney failed or someone else got it ahead of me. This was my lucky call."

Atiyeh said she has been feeling "pretty good" since her discharge from the hospital Aug. 2. She takes two anti-rejection medicines every day, she said, and her new kidneys appear to be working fine.

Transplanting a child's organs into an adult, however, is both risky and unusual.

Nationally, only 3 percent of adult transplant patients receive a child's kidneys. At LVH, no one had before Atiyeh. And in the more than 400 kidney transplants at LVH since the program began in 1991, each patient received just one kidney.

Since a child's kidney is less than half the size and weight of an adult's, both are used to keep up with the blood-purifying needs of an adult.

Dr. Pradip Chakrabarti, who has performed kidney-pancreas transplants at LVH and double-kidney transplants before that when he worked in Pittsburgh, said transplanting two kidneys at once is "more challenging" than a single-kidney transplant.

Kidneys from a child come to a transplant center with the main artery and vein connected to both organs and are inserted as one unit, he said.

For Atiyeh, that meant attaching the child's two kidneys to vessels on her right side. Her kidneys, which stopped working effectively in 2004, were left in place, a routine practice.

One risk associated with the operation, according to Chakrabarti, is that the kidney closest to the intestines twists, pinching the vessel leading to the bladder and keeping it from emptying completely. To avoid this, he left little slack in the connections, putting tension on the ureter, which connects the kidneys to the bladder, to keep it in place.

To meet Atiyeh's needs, he added, the child's kidneys will grow to adult size in six to eight months.

"I still can't believe it," Atiyeh said of a transplant she said has already changed her life for the better.

With working kidneys, she no longer needs to go for dialysis, an artificial blood cleansing treatment, three times a week.

She can eat tomatoes again after three years of avoiding her favorite sandwich food because tomatoes are high in

potassium, a mineral difficult to filter out.

And freedom from dialysis also means freedom to fly to Florida for the first time to visit a brother, who moved there from Northampton.

"I have a chance to live again," Atiyeh said. "This is an incredible gift."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

The July 25 operation made [Judith Atiyeh] the first LVH-Cedar Crest patient to receive two kidneys at once during the transplant program's 15-year history. It also marked the first time LVH's surgeons had transplanted a child's kidney into an adult.

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2 Photos by Rich Schultz, Special to The Morning Call - Freelance; 1. JUDITH ATIYEH, 63, received a double kidney transplant in July at Lehigh Valley Hospital. 2. FREEDOM FROM DIALYSIS means Judith Atiyeh can fly to Florida for the first time to visit a brother. Her new kidneys will also allow her to eat + tomatoes -- one of her favorite foods. "I have a chance to live again. This is an incredible gift,' she says.

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