

Patient Information:
Age-Targeted Kidney Transplant Program
Updated Dec 5, 2022

What is the purpose of this handout?

This document explains the new Age-Targeted kidney transplant program. It is for patients who will be 65 years of age or older at the time of transplant. It was written with input from healthcare providers and patients with kidney disease.

What is the goal of the program?

The name Age-Targeted was chosen because we are selecting or “targeting” older patients for these transplants. The goal is to help older patients get a transplant sooner than the standard transplant list, which can have very long wait times. Long wait times can be hard for older patients who may struggle with the effects of dialysis on their health and quality of life. Many patients will become too sick or even die before reaching the top of the current transplant wait list.

Where do these transplants come from?

The transplants for the Age-Targeted program come from what we call the “**alternative donor pool.**” These are kidneys from deceased donors who may have been older themselves, had high blood pressure or diabetes, or had abnormal kidney function at the time of their death. We do not usually offer these transplants through our standard list, but other places in Canada and elsewhere do. That means right now in Manitoba these kidneys are not used and do not help anyone.

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What are the benefits of a transplant through the Age-Targeted program?

Accepting a transplant from the alternative donor pool will shorten the amount of time you have to wait for a transplant. This will allow you to experience the benefits of a transplant sooner. Many older patients feel a transplant lets them be more independent and get back to the activities they enjoy. Most patients report a better quality of life compared to being on dialysis. In many cases, accepting a transplant from the Age-Targeted program can help you live longer compared with waiting for the standard list.

Please remember, if you have a living donor that is still your best option for a transplant.

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What are the risks of a transplant through the Age-Targeted program?

When transplants come from the alternative donor pool, there are some different risks. There is a small chance that the transplant does not work after being placed into your body. All transplants have this risk, but it will be slightly higher in this program. Keep in mind that even though the risk is higher, almost all of these transplants will work.

Most transplants from the Age-Targeted program will be slow to start working. This is called delayed graft function. This means you will likely have a longer stay in the hospital (2-3 weeks) and require temporary dialysis until the transplant starts working.

Once the transplant does start working, we do not expect it to last as long as a standard transplant. However, we still expect these transplants to last an amount of time that many older adults find acceptable.

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Is there any protection against these risks?

If you receive a transplant from the Age-Targeted program and it does not work or it stops working within 1 year, you may have to return to dialysis. If this happens you will keep the wait time you have earned towards the standard list so that you are not disadvantaged. However, having one failed transplant can make it harder to match for another transplant.

Who should consider this program?

If you are 65 years or older and not yet on dialysis, or have only been on dialysis for a few years, you may face a long wait for a standard transplant. This program may be your best chance at getting a transplant in your lifetime. For patients like you, we believe accepting an Age-Targeted transplant as soon as possible will help you live longer and live better. As with any transplant surgery, that benefit will come with some risk upfront.

If you have already been on dialysis for many years, you may be getting close to the top of the standard waiting list. In that case the benefits of an Age-Targeted transplant may not apply to you and the risks may not be worth it. Your transplant doctor will help you make the decision that is right for you.

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What is the alternative?

Accepting a transplant through the Age-Targeted program is voluntary for patients aged 65 and older. Older patients will continue to be offered transplants through the standard list, but those offers may take years to come. You can choose to be on both lists at the same time until you receive a transplant.

If you are not part of the Age-Targeted program you will likely be on some form of dialysis for several years while waiting on the standard list. Many patients do well on dialysis and find a modality that suits their lifestyle as best as possible.

Where can I get more information?

The information in this handout is available on the Transplant Manitoba website, which also has general information about the standard transplant program. Your transplant doctor can go over some additional handouts with you if numbers or pictures will help with your decision. We have also prepared a short video explaining the Age-Targeted program.

We encourage you to discuss this with your kidney clinic or dialysis doctor and your family or support system. Please talk to your transplant coordinator if you have any further questions.

Notes or Questions
