**Cheryl Martin (Host):** There's an increasing need for more people to donate an organ while they are alive to a person in desperate need of a transplant. Here in the United States, there are more than 5,700 living organ donations each year. The most popular are kidney and liver transplants from one person to another. We'll learn about the power of living organ donation from Kristi Hadfield. She's an Ambulatory Education Coordinator at Memorial Health System.

This is Memorial Health Radio with Memorial Health System Ohio. I'm Cheryl Martin. Kristi, you know firsthand the importance of living donations. What led to your interest?

**Kristi Hadfield:** Living organ donation is something that I was not familiar with. I worked as a paramedic before I came to Memorial Health System and had a lot of patients who needed organs and we would take them back and forth and I never really understood that you did not have to die to be an organ donor. So, working in healthcare, I was able to come in contact with a patient who I worked with on the ambulance, and then I got to know his daughter through then and found out that she needed a kidney.

**Host:** And when you found this out, what was your initial response?

**Kristi Hadfield:** My initial response with my recipient was I knew I needed to help. I knew I needed to do whatever I could to help her be able to live to have a life. So, it was kind of something that I had a peace about immediately, just to find out what I could do to help her.

**Host:** Now, was she a teenager, young child, adult?

**Kristi Hadfield:** She was an adult. Her father was my patient when I worked as a paramedic. So, I got to meet her through him, and then she had a 15-year-old daughter.

**Host:** What were the first steps? Lead us down the pathway of becoming a living organ donor.

**Kristi Hadfield:** So, the first step was for my recipient to be put on the actual transplant list. As soon as she was put on the list to need a kidney, I immediately reached out to the transplant center. I gave them my name. when you reach out to them, you can do a directed donation, meaning you know who you want to donate to, or you can do a non-directed donation, that you can just say, "I have a kidney. I want to be able to help somebody." so, the first part is reaching out to the transplant center.

**Host:** Because if you know the specific person, they move up on the list.

**Kristi Hadfield:** Absolutely. The average wait time for somebody that is waiting on a cadaver kidney of somebody who has already passed away is five years. So by having a directed donation, that can move them up the list a little bit as far as they know somebody who they can start doing the testing on to see if they're a match.

**Host:** How long did this entire procedure take?

**Kristi Hadfield:** So, Molly reached out to me in March of 2022 and said that she was able to be put on the list for a transplant. So, we started, I believe, that day I called the transplant center and said, "I've got Molly's kidney. How do we proceed?"

**Host:** Was this just something that you knew in your heart you were supposed to do for her? I mean, she's not a blood relative.

**Kristi Hadfield:** She's absolutely not a blood relative. And honestly, I said, "This is what I was going to do. I have your kidney," before I ever even knew I had a peace about it. So much so that after I told her that I was contacting, I thought, "I probably should let my family know that this is what I've decided to do," but I just had a peace about it. I had something, I could help somebody, and I was going to try to do everything I could.

**Host:** What was your family's response?

**Kristi Hadfield:** "That's what you do, Mom." And my grandkids are like, "Mimi, that's who you are. So whatever you have to do, we support you."

**Host:** That's great. Now, during this whole process, especially when it's a kidney, do you have to make sure that you're a good match?

**Kristi Hadfield:** Absolutely. As a potential donor, I am assigned an advocate, and that is a different advocate than the recipient would have, just to make sure that I am the best match I could be, and it's not going to put my health at risk. So, they check you from head to toe, and they do all kinds of medical testing. They do psychological testing. They want to make sure that it is not putting my life in peril, and that it is giving the recipient the best chance at success.

**Host:** How long was the operation?

**Kristi Hadfield:** I was in surgery, my part of it was about an hour. And then, my kidney went right down the hallway and got to meet Ms. Molly. And I was in recovery after that. And actually, I was only in the hospital overnight, and then I was released.

**Host:** Were you on pins and needles after your part, wondering if indeed your kidney was the answer?

**Kristi Hadfield:** Honestly, my first response when I came to was, "How's Molly? Is she okay? Did everything go okay?" And I got the news that it pinked up right away and she was doing phenomenal. So then, I could exhale. That was my biggest relief.

**Host:** And how are the two of you doing today?

**Kristi Hadfield:** Absolutely phenomenal. I found out after the surgery in December of '22 that Molly probably wouldn't have been with us past February of the following year. She is doing amazing. I actually go up with her for her appointments. We had her annual appointment. I got to go up and see everybody at the transplant center. She's doing phenomenal. She has a new lease on life. Her daughter's now, I think, 17, so they can go out and do things. And it's given her her life back and it's given me a new family. So, it's been kind of great.

**Host:** That is amazing when you think about if you had not stepped up to the plate to be a living organ donor, Molly would not be alive today.

**Kristi Hadfield:** It just gives you goosebumps. You know, we are putting on this earth to help each other however we can. I can lead a full normal amazing life with one kidney. So if I can help, I'm going to help. That's just what we should do.

**Host:** So, this has clearly changed your life.

**Kristi Hadfield:** Absolutely. When Molly and I started this process, we wanted to do everything we can to bring life to living organ donation. The day that we had our surgery, there was another what they call a kidney chain, a transplant chain, where seven different people, they weren't a match to a particular person, but they were able to all go through the surgery to help seven people get a kidney.

It's phenomenal. I always felt safe. I always felt heard. The best thing was when I was able to call Molly and say, "Guess what? We're approved and here's our date." And something else that people may not understand is the recipient's insurance takes care of everything as far as with the testing, with the surgery. So, the donor does not go into debt to be able to help. So, that's been something that's been great too.

**Host:** That's great, because I was going to ask you, will donating affect the donor financially? And it does not.

**Kristi Hadfield:** It does not. And actually, through the National Living Donor Assistance Center, they also reimburse you for any lost wages, for your travel time. So, I did not have to take leave or anything, because they took care of it through there. So, it's really an amazing program that they have.

**Host:** Kristi, in closing, what words would you give to someone even thinking about becoming a living donor or someone who's never thought about it before?

**Kristi Hadfield:** I would say reach out, reach out to a transplant center, reach out, talk to people around, and just try. And if it turns out that you're not a good match for a donor, then just spread the awareness that this can happen. So many people think that, "It's on my license, I'm going to be a donor if I die," and that's wonderful. But you can still be a donor and live. And it's incredible. And the feelings that you get as a donor, it's just an amazing feeling. You've helped somebody. And in helping somebody, you actually help yourself as well.

**Host:** Kristi Hadfield, thanks so much for sharing your story of becoming a living donor and also sharing your passion for others to take that step. Thank you.

**Kristi Hadfield:** Thank you, Cheryl.

**Host:** That wraps up this episode of Memorial Health Radio with Memorial Health System. Head on over to our website at mhsystem.org for more information and to get connected with one of our providers. Please remember to subscribe, rate, and review this podcast and all other Memorial Health System podcasts. Thanks for listening to Memorial Health Radio.