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VA now transplanting kidneys that are positive for hepatitis C

Some Veterans on waiting list may be eligible for procedure

Underscoring its mission of improving the quality of life for Veterans, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently began offering a new option to patients awaiting kidney transplants: organs that are positive for hepatitis (hep) C.

In early March, a team from the [Iowa City VA \(ICVA\) Health Care System \(HCS\)](#) successfully transplanted hep C positive kidneys into four Veteran patients, then immediately began the [treatment process to cure the viral infection](#) that causes liver inflammation.

“At VA, we have the ability to quickly adopt medical advancements almost as soon as they are reported in medical literature,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Providing high quality procedures, such as innovative organ transplants, illustrates the good stewardship of our resources and VA’s commitment to Veterans and the American people.”

Dr. Daniel Katz, transplant surgery director for the ICVAHCS, said VA was quick to understand the bigger picture and the long-term, cost-savings potential of the new procedure.

“The high cost of hep C treatment may hinder rapid adoption of this practice in the private sector, where the transplant center may not be reimbursed for the hep C treatment,” Katz said. “Even with the hep C treatment, though, there will be cost savings over time by removing patients from dialysis.”

The ICVAHCS transplant team has successfully conducted more than 475 organ transplants and is on track to reach 500 in 2020. The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is the most common bloodborne disease in the United States. VA has treated and cured more HCV patients than any other HCS in the country, and is [on track to eliminate the HCV in about a month](#) in all Veterans willing and able to be treated. As of March 3, nearly 116,000 Veterans started all-oral hep C medications in VA, of which 96,654 Veterans completed treatment and have been cured.

Part of a VA treatment program, U.S. Navy Veteran Jack Jones was cured of hep C more than two years ago. But Jones still needed a new kidney.

On March 8, the ICVAHCS offered to transplant his kidney, then cure the hep C that it carried through a similar process that had cured him before. Jones jumped at the chance, and his transplant was successfully completed the next day.

“I would recommend this [procedure], and the VA, to anyone,” said Jones, who is now back to his regular life at home in Asheville, North Carolina.

Other VA Transplant Centers also provide Veterans the opportunity to choose to receive hep C positive donor organs with post-transplant treatment. Participating centers include William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Madison, Wisconsin (liver and heart); Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia (heart); VA Portland Health Care System in Portland, Oregon (liver); Tennessee Valley Healthcare System in Nashville, Tennessee (liver and heart); and VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (liver).

Visit www.iowacity.va.gov for more information about the hep C organ transplant team.

VA leads the country in hepatitis screening, testing, treatment, research and prevention. For more information about VA’s research in this area, visit <https://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>.

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