



Sisters aim to educate on organ donations

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ROCKTON — Denise Snelling says it was an easy choice to give her kidney to sister Michelle Vronch.

"To me it was a given that I was going to do that," Snelling says of the decision to volunteer for the procedure that saved her younger sister's life.

With a successful transplant in the books for about a month, the sisters say they want to spread the message to encourage more people to choose to be living organ donors.

There are about 76,600 patients awaiting kidney transplants in the U.S., according to information on the [National Kidney Foundation's Web site](#). Eighteen people die each day while waiting for a kidney transplant.

Snelling said she would encourage donation whether it's for a family member or someone you've never met.

"The Lord gave you two and you only need one, so give it away," Snelling said. "If I had another one to give away, yes, I would give it to a stranger."

Vronch and Snelling, who are in their mid-40s and just 18 months apart in age, were somewhat sibling rivals during their days at Harlem High School, they said. But as adults they've been sisters and close friends, connecting frequently by phone between Rockton, where Vronch lives, and Lexington, S.C., where Snelling stays.

Doctors discovered that Vronch had polycystic kidney disease in 1992 after she went to the doctor with complaints of bad back pain. The slow-progressing disease, characterized by the growth of cysts, prevents healthy kidney function and can lead to kidney failure.

Snelling told her that when the time came, she'd give her kidney away. That time came 17 years later and luckily, the two were a match. The surgery was performed July 8. Vronch's kidney, which she said was covered with golf-ball-sized cysts, weighed 7 pounds when it was removed.

"She saved my life, literally, she did," Vronch said. "I couldn't do enough for what she gave up."

The sisters had experience with the need for kidney transplants even before Vronch was diagnosed. Their father, Terry Mitchell, got the kidney he needed 22 years ago from a man killed in a motorcycle crash.

Snelling, who recovered well after the procedure, plans to take the message about the need for donors back to South Carolina.

Vronch, who is the program director for the Harlem Community Center in Machesney Park, is recovering well and waiting for her immune system to build back up before returning to work.

Medications that prevent the rejection of a transplant kidney also suppress the body's immune system. She hopes to return to HCC in October.

"Once I had the transplant, it was amazing," Vronch said. "They always said your energy level is going to be unbelievable, and I've really noticed the difference. I feel really good."

Kidney facts

* More than 26 million Americans older than 20 have chronic kidney disease.

* About 76,604 patients are awaiting kidney transplants and more than 2,373 are waiting for kidney-pancreas transplants.

* Eighteen people die a day while waiting for a transplant.

* Polycystic Kidney Disease affects 600,000 Americans and 12.5 million children and adults, worldwide.

Source: *National Kidney Foundation, September 2008*

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