



YOUR VOICE, YOUR HEALTH: A KIDNEY COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE KIDNEY PATIENT ADVISORY COUNCIL OF THE FORUM OF ESRD NETWORKS

APRIL IS DONATE LIFE MONTH!

Greetings from Mary Baliker, Co-Chair of the Forum of ESRD Networks' Kidney Patient Advisory Council (KPAC). Our goal is to support patients with kidney disease by educating and sharing patient stories as we all have our own journeys and challenges. May this support you and yours on your personal journey!

I have over 30 years of experience working in healthcare. I am also a dedicated healthcare advocate and kidney patient. I was diagnosed with a rare kidney disease at the young age of nine, 40-plus years ago. Since then, I have undergone in-center hemodialysis and received four kidney transplants. I am

also the author of *Maria Never Gives Up*, a story written to help children and families facing chronic illnesses. The book is distributed across transplant and dialysis centers nationwide and is available on Amazon.

April is Donate Life Month! We are excited to share Mike Crowley's story of being an altruistic living kidney donor. We also share personal patient and donor comments and some current statistics on organ donation. We hope you benefit from this issue!

Waiting for a Transplant

- *17 people die each day while waiting for a transplant*
- *Wait time for a kidney transplant is 3-5 years*
- *One donor can save 8 lives and enhance over 75 more*

**Register to be an organ donor at
<https://registerme.org>.**

Written by Michael Crowley

Living the Mission: A Kidney Donor Story

A decade ago, Mike Crowley never thought that someday he would give his kidney to a stranger. But, on January 8, 2025, that is precisely what happened.

Just over four years ago, Crowley joined the National Kidney Foundation of Wisconsin (NKFw) as CEO. As a longtime advocate in the chronic disease space, the mission - preventing kidney disease, improving life for those impacted by kidney disease, and increasing the availability of organs for transplantation - was a natural fit. He is a consistent blood donor and registered for deceased organ donation. He felt like he was doing his part.

The more Crowley connected with the kidney community, the more gaps he saw. Over 100,000 people are waiting for a lifesaving organ transplant in the US, including approximately 1,200 people active on the waitlist for a kidney transplant in Wisconsin. "When you focus on the statistics of kidney disease, the problem can seem insurmountable," reflects Crowley. "But, there is so much hope in this space if you just look for it. The stories of kidney transplant from recipients, living donors, and families of deceased organ donors kept calling back to me."



Mike Crowley and Mary Baliker

As Crowley's 60th birthday approached, the pull was too strong to ignore. He inquired with a transplant center to see if he would be eligible to become a living kidney donor. After months of physical and psychosocial testing, he was approved, matched, and scheduled for surgery. On the morning of January 8, he arrived for the operation knowing that his kidney would go to someone in Wisconsin.

One day, if both the donor and recipient agree, they will have the option to exchange contact information. But, for Crowley, helping was enough. "I've donated more than nine gallons of blood, and I've never met anyone who benefitted from it. Why should a kidney be any different?"

"I'm a living kidney donor because I was born with a spare part, and someone needed it to live. Why wouldn't I share my spare?"

Destiny O.

"I...donated on my birthday because it's the day I was given life, and now I had the opportunity to help someone get a second chance at life."

Amy M.