

Rod Ellis recovering after successful kidney transplant

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

After successfully receiving a kidney transplant Thursday, Sept. 3, Rod Ellis has a renewed quality of life. He and his family feel blessed that Ellis' former HHS Class of 1978 classmate Clay Warren came forward to be a living donor with the blessings of his own family.

At 7:30 a.m. on Sept. 3 at Presbyterian St. Luke's Hospital (PSL) in Denver, Warren and Ellis gave each other thumbs-up as they were wheeled off to their respective operating rooms. They were told the kidney transplant surgery would take approximately three hours.

By 9:30 a.m. the donor's surgeon came out to tell the families all had gone well with the removal of Warren's kidney, and they would begin transplanting his kidney into Ellis.

The transplant surgery took a little longer than expected on Ellis due to two factors: the donor's kidney had two arteries coming off it, and the transplant recipient's kidneys were still functioning, making it difficult for the surgeon to determine if the transplanted kidney was excreting the bile or Ellis' own kidneys.

Due to the uncertainty of kidney function, the surgeon went back in a second time only to reconfirm to himself the donated kidney was working properly.

At 3 p.m. the donor's surgeon finally came to tell the families they could see Ellis in another hour.

As all eight of Ellis' family members gathered around him in ICU, his first question was, "How is Clay?" followed by "Do you think I can watch the Bronco game tonight?"

Later that night Ellis had to go for a Nuclear Test of the new kidney to make sure the blood was passing efficiently through it.

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Warren was in the hospital until Sunday, Sept. 6 with a follow-up appointment at PSL on Wednesday, Sept. 9 at which time he was released by the Transplant Team, with limitations on driving and exercise for the first two weeks after surgery. While recovering in Denver, he continued to stay in touch with the youth and congregation of the Tacoma Christian Reformed Community Church where he is a youth minister.

Warren and his wife Naomi flew home Friday, Sept. 11 where their wonderful friends in Puyallup, Wash. had arranged for them to be picked up in a limo.

As for Ellis, he was released from the hospital on Monday, Sept. 7. He continues to make visits to the Transplant Center at PSL two times a week. At these appointments they monitor his blood pressure, temperature and weight along with the level of the necessary medications in his blood. As his vitals and medications start to stabilize, his trips to the Transplant Center will become less.

Ellis currently takes nine pills twice every day. Two of the drugs are immunosuppressant drugs, and he will continue to take some form of that for the rest of his life to prevent rejection of his donated kidney.

Driving restrictions were lifted Friday, Sept. 18. Exercise is important after transplant surgery but limited for the first month. Ellis is currently up to walking a quarter of a mile two times a day. Soon he will be able to go back to riding a stationary bike with light tension.

He had high hopes of attending the home opener for the Broncos, but due to his lowered immune system, the doctors recommended avoiding large crowds for the first 90 days.

Dietary restrictions for Ellis include foods lower in sodium and fat. Currently he is trying to increase his water intake to make his new kidney excrete more of the waste, keeping his creatine level down below two. The doctor strongly encouraged him to drink a gallon of water daily.

Ellis and his family are very appreciative to everyone who sent cards, e-mails or made calls to

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see how his surgery went and how his recovery is going. Warren's sermon on Sunday, Sept. 20 was on "Second Chances," which was certainly what Ellis was given. He feels very fortunate to have grown up in a small community where people and friends still care.