

*Recipient Speaks*

## Two Lives, One Gift: The Lifelong Bond Between Donor and Recipient



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I remember the disappointment with aching clarity—twice, the promise of a donor heart dissolved, even as the transplant team travelled to cities in response to donor calls. In my darkest hours, I found myself wondering whether I had come to Chennai—India's most trusted home for heart transplantation—not to be saved, but to die.

Every ten minutes, a new patient is added to the transplant waiting list, while organ shortages result in nearly 20 deaths each day.<sup>1</sup> Many organs from both living and deceased donors are ultimately unsuitable, making the wait unpredictable and emotionally draining for recipients. The fear of losing a second chance at life is ever-present. It is no surprise, then, that when my transplant finally happened, relief and joy were overwhelming. I was free from heart failure—and given life anew.

During recovery, I learnt that I was the 180<sup>th</sup> transplant recipient at that centre. Yet beyond the surgery, the medicines, and the statistics, a deeper realization emerged: organ transplantation creates a unique, lifelong relationship—symbiotic, profound, and transformative. In a single moment, both donor and recipient give and receive life. A transplanted organ carries more than cells and tissue; it carries trust, responsibility, and the promise of continuity. This bond extends far beyond the operating theatre.

For the recipient, the organ enables breathing, walking, loving, working, and dreaming again. For the donor, or the donor's family, it represents legacy—an enduring presence in another human life. Many recipients speak of a quiet reverence for the gift they carry, a constant reminder that life and gratitude are inseparable.

These connections are powerfully reflected in a book called *New Life. New Beginnings*, where stories abound of kidney recipients maintaining disciplined routines, heart recipients flourishing years after transplant, liver and lung recipients rebuilding full, meaningful lives—often while remaining deeply mindful of their donors.

This relationship is lifelong and unconditional. The wellbeing of the transplanted organ depends on careful medical follow-up,

adherence to treatment, and an informed, engaged recipient. At the same time, the donor's contribution warrants enduring respect, recognition, and protection. Sustaining this bond requires vigilance, education, and support—not just from families, but from society as a whole.

Organizations such as MOHAN Foundation, Organ India, Kidney Warriors, hospitals, transplant societies, and advocacy groups must work collectively to safeguard the interests of both donors and recipients. Together, they can advocate for stronger government systems, improved infrastructure, and sustainable funding, while promoting public education that normalizes organ donation and highlights its lifelong impact. They also play a crucial role in guiding recipients to transform survival into long-term wellness.

India's transplant ecosystem has made commendable progress, but much remains to be done. Each transplanted heart, kidney, or liver stands as living evidence of human generosity. Long-term success depends on early detection of rejection, affordable access to immunosuppressants, and structured medical, financial, and psychosocial support for donors' families and recipients alike.

Ultimately, transplantation is more than a medical procedure—it is a partnership between human lives. Recipients live in daily gratitude to their donors. Many go on to become counsellors, advocates, and educators, sharing their stories with the society. The donor entrusts a part of themselves; the recipient carries it forward with care and reverence. When communities, policymakers, and institutions recognize and nurture this shared responsibility, they help create a culture that honours life in its most connected form.

As a young graduate recipient poignantly notes in her story “A New Dawn”,<sup>2</sup> organ donation transcends caste, creed, and religion. Donor and recipient become equals in humanity. Living and deceased donors alike remind us that this relationship is sacred and enduring—and that society has a duty to sustain it. Let us work together to ensure that every donor gift is respected, every recipient empowered, and every transplanted life allowed to reach its fullest potential. Division diminishes impact; in moments that save lives, unity alone has value.

#### References

1. Bindu Shajan Perappadan. *Organ shortage continues to cost lives. The Hindu. August 7, 2023. Accessed January 15, 2025.*
2. Kirpal V, ed. *New Life. New Beginnings: Compelling Stories by Organ Recipients, Donors, and Doctors. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd, 2025.*

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