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RPA nurse with heart of gold

Every day Mimi Antonios sees patients on life support with no hope of recovery in her job as nursing unit manager in one of Royal Prince Alfred's four intensive care units.

She watches as families, experiencing the most horrendous day of their lives, are engulfed in pain as they say goodbye to their loved ones, knowing their worlds will never be the same again.

And she sees them break through that agony to offer up one of life's most precious gifts – donating their loved one's organs to someone facing a death sentence.



Anthony Antonios with his wife Mimi.

So when her chance to step up came, she didn't hesitate.

Mimi's husband, Anthony, has chronic kidney disease and needed help so last month Mimi donated a kidney through the Australian Paired Kidney Exchange Program.

If a recipient has a living donor willing to give them an organ but cannot due to incompatible tissue type or blood group, the program searches the entire available database of registered recipient/donor pairs across Australia to look for combinations where the donor in an incompatible pair can be matched to a recipient in another pair. If the computer finds a compatible match, two or more simultaneous transplants can occur by exchanging donors.

"Anthony and I have been married for 18 years and we met he had already received his first kidney transplant. I knew that one day he'd need another so I was prepared from the start to donate my kidney to him when he needed it," she said.

For Anthony, the paired program allowed for a better medical match to be made, increasing the odds of a successful transplant for all involved.

"This is my second kidney transplant and a difference in blood type and antibodies meant my wife was a better match for another kidney recipient," he said.

People in need of a kidney have two options. Wait on the national list for an organ donor to die, or find a person willing to donate a kidney to them.

“We both work full time and my dialysis took a hell of a lot out of Mimi’s life as well my own. We really didn’t get much sleep over the past three years,” Anthony said.

RPA nephrologist Dr Adrian Gillin says those with kidney failure can endure plenty of discomfort.

“Anthony has lived most of his life with chronic kidney disease, but he has stayed optimistic throughout the time that he was reliant on a haemodialysis machine and was also lucky enough to have a health practitioner as a wife,” Dr Gillin said

While recipients undergo rigorous health checks, donors are also selected very carefully for these procedures.

“Most organ donors are healthier than the general population,” Dr Gillin said.

About 1,400 Australians are on waiting lists for a life-saving transplant, and one organ and tissue donor can save the lives of 10 or more people, according to Transplant Australia.

This week is DonateLife Week. To register as an organ donor, please visit <https://register.donatelife.gov.au>

For more information on the paired kidney program, please visit: <http://www.donatelife.gov.au/australian-paired-kidney-exchange-akx-program>