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MEDIA RELEASE

Kidney Transplant Programs suspended

Transplant Australia today expressed concern for the welfare of people waiting for a kidney transplant in the face of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Transplant Australia CEO, Chris Thomas, was commenting following confirmation that Australia's living and deceased kidney donation programs were now suspended.

"As of last month there were 1,232 Australians waiting for a kidney transplant. They are currently being informed by their transplant unit that all programs are suspended with the decision to be reviewed weekly," Mr Thomas said.

It is a scenario being played out in transplant units in many other nations across the world.

"It is an unenviable dilemma for our transplantation doctors and nurses who work tirelessly to give these people new life through transplantation. This pandemic is now having consequences in areas we never imagined."

Transplant Australia supports the decision by the Transplantation Society of Australia and New Zealand as clearly patients remaining on dialysis will have less risks than proceeding through transplantation where significant immune-suppression therapies are applied to ensure survival of the kidney transplant.

"Quite simply the risks at this time outweigh the potential benefits. If someone received a transplant in this current environment and then was exposed to Coronavirus while their immune system was recovering there could be severe complications. Continued dialysis therapy is preferred although we acknowledge not without its own risks.

"However we can't help feel for people who may have waited years for a transplant. They will need mental health support, guidance and counselling over the coming months and until this pandemic is over."

Transplant Australia was grateful that transplantation programs for Liver, Heart, Lung, Paediatric and multi-organ transplants were continuing with a focus on the more urgent cases.



“Transplantation has been one of the most significant medical advances of the last 60 or 70 years. It has saved thousands of Australians and hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. Never did we imagine a virus like COVID-19 would impact upon this success so harshly,” Mr Thomas said.

“But it is important to underline that we still need Australians to support donation. People waiting for a heart, liver or lung transplant need that confidence while those waiting for a kidney transplant will hope and trust that once the pandemic subsides all programs can recommence immediately.”

Transplant Australia has been advising all recipients and those waiting for a transplant to take the advice of the Department of Health about isolation and hygiene extremely seriously.

“Organ transplant recipients and others with underlying health conditions are urged to rigorously adhere to health advisories issued by the Department of Health as well as local and state and territory health departments.

Transplant recipients seeking more information on the potential impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable people should call the 24/7 Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080.

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