Beat Goes On

The largest organ transplant program in the Southeast is run out of a Gulf Coast hospital. Size didn’t come easy, though, and there are several potential roadblocks to continued growth.

Doctors and administrators at Tampa General Hospital’s organ transplant program say being big was never the goal, but a recent feat turns that premise upside down.

The accomplishment: The unit, with 500 transplants performed, moved up six spots on the list of highest volume transplant centers in the country in 2011, from 10th to fourth.

Only the UCLA Health System in Los Angeles, California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco and New York-Presbyterian Hospital performed more transplants in 2011, according to Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network data. There are 258 solid organ transplant centers in the country, and the TGH program is the largest in the Southeast.

Moreover, OPTN, a division of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, reported all five of TGH’s specific transplant programs were among the 10 busiest centers in the country last year. It’s the first time that’s happened in the history of the TGH transplant program, which dates back to 1974, when the hospital first successfully performed a heart transplant. Tampa General is a nonprofit hospital, with 1,018 beds and 6,900 employees. It had about $1.2 billion in 2011 revenue.

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Dr. Victor Bowers, one of the lead TGH transplant surgeons, adds that the sheer number of transplant surgeries pales when compared to how people do, and live, after they get replacement organs. "You can increase your numbers," Dr. Bowers says, "but if you don’t have good patient results, then you’re not really doing a service."

Nonetheless, a large, and growing, organ transplant program can provide a big boost to a medical center. For one, the notoriety can raise community awareness of the entire hospital. Plus, a publicized organ donor story can draw interest in a transplant program’s services.

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NATIONALY RANKED
The transplant program at Tampa General Hospital specializes in five areas: heart, kidney, kidney-pancreas, liver and lung. Here’s a breakdown of where each program ranks nationwide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>2011 Transplants</th>
<th>National Ranking</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>10th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kidney-pancreas</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>9th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lung</td>
<td>56</td>
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Not only for the cost of the surgery, says Korson, but in other key areas, like equipment, training and employees. The transplant program utilizes 120 hospital employees at any given time, from intensive care nurses to dietary staff to surgeons.

Symbiotic success
The TGH transplant program isn’t only one of the biggest in the country; it’s also one of the more unique. That’s because it isn’t run exclusively out of a teaching hospital, which is the foundation for most other large transplants programs. The hospital is connected with the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine, but most of the surgeons aren’t professors.

Instead, the transplant program is a partnership with The LifeLink Transplant Institute, a subsidiary of Tampa-based LifeLink Foundation. A nonprofit overseen by the National Organ Transplant Act Congress passed in 1984, LifeLink procures the organs TGH uses in the transplant surgeries. The group covers 15 counties in west and central Florida, including the entire Gulf Coast ex-
cept for Collier County, which is part of another organization.

The other side of the partnership, surgery and patient recovery, falls to the Tampa General Medical Group. That practice was created in 2010, and includes doctors who once only worked for LifeLink.

The partnership is symbiotic. “Our ability to perform 500 transplants is a direct result of LifeLink’s ability to acquire the organs,” TGH President and CEO Ron Hytoff says in a press release.

Adds Korson: “This isn’t a situation where one person does this. Transplantation is truly something only a team can do.”

Korsun also says the TGH transplant program has a high tolerance for unusual cases — another aspect of the unit’s uniqueness. “We do a number of high-risk patients that many other transplant centers wouldn’t consider,” says Korson. “I think that speaks to the talent we have.”

High-risk ranges from how sick a patient is to someone with an illness separate from the organs. A patient’s age can complicate transplant surgery, too, much like the controversy generated when former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, at 71, recently received a heart transplant.

Bowers says TGH strives to make all transplant surgeries look routine. “When you pull it off, it seems as simple as getting a haircut,” says Bowers. “But it isn’t. It’s very complicated.”

Large needs
Medical complexities aside, the TGH transplant program faces several other potential hurdles to continued growth.

A constant one is organ supply. Nearly 140,000 people nationwide are on a waiting list for an organ transplant, according to TGH. The list is about 4,000 in Florida, including 600 people in the Greater Tampa area. About a half a kidney, says Dr. Bowers.

That’s why organ donor education and outreach is a key focus at LifeLink. “We are constantly dependent on the number of donors in the community,” says Bowers. “We have a huge patient supply and a huge need from our communities.”

The federal health care overhaul, currently in the hands of the U.S. Supreme Court, will also play a role in the future of the program, says Korson. “(Transplant surgery) is an expensive process,” says Korson. “Patients need to have insurance.”

The costs, furthermore, don’t end after the surgery. For instance, anti-rejection medications, which help the body adjust to the organ, are one of the pricier post-operation costs. The first year, says Korson, could cost a patient $250,000.

Korson, a nurse who got into transplant nursing with the simple statement, “If not me, then who?” is now a transplant program administrator in Brandon.

“Certainly, as an organization we want to grow (and) stay in this top stratosphere,” says Korson. “But when you are growing you have to be careful about controlled growth. We always have to be fiscally prudent.”

Lindell Capital Increases Lending Portfolio
With loans on Rental Homes and Brandon Medical Center
Carl Lindell Jr., founder of Lindell Capital, LLC, has announced the expansion of its loan portfolio to include a local entrepreneur with 51 rental homes and another with a fully leased medical center in Brandon.

Lindell said “The demand for a lender with over 40 years of local business experience continues to increase and presents us with unique lending opportunities.”

“We look forward to helping our friends in the Brandon area with their real estate needs. They are looking for a lender who can manage a wide variety of loan types.”

Two new loan requests were presented to us by local business entrepreneurs, with a sound business plan and a history of success, but were unable to secure traditional credit facilities. We approved and funded the loans within thirty days.”

Lindell ended his announcement with the simple statement, “If the request makes good business sense, we’ll consider the loan.”