

Examples

Dear friend

At long last I am able to sit down and write the most deserving thank you letter of my life, namely for the gift of a new lung to continue and improve the joys of living which have been denied to me in recent years.

I realise that you have lost a very dear person and my heart-felt sympathy goes out to you, but I hope there will be some consolation in knowing your loss has allowed another life to continue, which would otherwise have been impossible.

My wife and family join me in thanking you most sincerely for this wonderful gift and wish you and yours all that is good in the years to come. You are in our prayers today and everyday.

To the wife of my donor

It seem such an inadequate way to address a letter to someone I owe so much thanks to.

There are two feelings you get when the call comes about a donor organ, the first is a feeling of elation, at a chance of life, the second, about three seconds later, is a feeling of guilt when you realise that someone somewhere has an immense feeling of grief.

I was an active, fit, non-smoker, until I developed the autoimmune disease, Fibrosing Alveolitis. Before I received my transplant I was in a very poor state, our house was piped for oxygen and I only had about three months left to live. After the transplant, when I awoke everything seemed right, the lung was a perfect fit and felt very comfortable, best of all I could breathe without effort. The doctors tell me I'm doing well.

My wife and I thank you very much for the decision you had to make, at a very difficult time, and I promise to do my upmost to look after the lung and live a long and happy life. We also hope that you will be able to find some happiness in your own life at a later date.

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Writing to your donor's family

A patient's guide

Introduction

It is our experience that many patients have asked about their donor and many have wanted to say 'thank you' to the family of their donor. This leaflet is intended to explain how such a letter can be written. We will also explain how these letters are processed and what may happen after your letter is passed on to the family.

It has been shown that donor families react very positively on receiving such letters. The mother of a 25 year old donor said: "You just need to know how the recipients are doing. I made copies of my letter and sent them to family and friends. The letter opened a lot of eyes. More people are going to donate because of it." The husband of another donor said: "It feels good to know that the recipients of the gift of life appreciate what has been done for them."

What are the families told?

Within seven days of donation donor families receive a letter from their local transplant co-ordinator thanking them for their donation. In this first letter they are given information on the patients who have received, we generally give them your age and gender, if you are married or single and if you have any children. We tell them how long you have spent on the waiting list. We do not tell them whereabouts in the country you live, or divulge any other information that may identify you.

The donor co-ordinator will write back to the family of your donor two months and six months later with an update on your progress.

They are always honest and tell the family if the transplant has failed for any reason.

What are the recipients told?

Not every recipient asks for information about their donor, but if you would like to know, then do ask one of the transplant co-ordinators or one of the nurses in TCCU. You will be told of your donor's gender and age and some general information about their cause of death. You will not be told whereabouts in the country your donor lived.

Writing to the family

We would recommend that you wait until after discharge before writing to the family. Most people write between two and six months after their transplant. However, you can write at any time, months or even years after your transplant, these letters are always appreciated by the donor family. The letter/card should not identify you (apart from your first name) no addresses or telephone numbers, nor mention your transplant centre. Please do not seal the envelope as the transplant co-ordinator who knows the donor family will want to check the letter for confidentiality before passing it on. We would also prefer that you don't date the letter or card, as we may be unable to pass it on for some time, and would not want to cause the family any distress by its delay.

The letter or card normally starts with Dear Friends or Dear Family, and goes on to introduce you e.g. my name is Tom, I am 36 years old and have been unwell for four years. I am married with three children and have not worked for a few years due to my ill

health. Most people then describe how life was before the transplant and explain the positive changes that have occurred since the transplant operation.

Everyone says their 'thank you' in different ways and everyone finds this a very difficult letter to write but we can reassure you that any letter will be greatly appreciated by the donor family. The letter should then be given to TCCU staff or given directly to one of the transplant co-ordinators. They will then pass it on to the transplant co-ordinator who has been looking after the family.

We have a couple of example letters* to look at if you need any more help. Alternatively speak to a member of TCCU staff.

What happens next?

Unless we hear otherwise you can assume that your letter has been passed on to the donor family. Occasionally the donor family will reply to your letter, to thank you and to ask you to write again in the near future to let them know how you are. All letters will continue to be passed via the transplant co-ordinators until a time comes when both you and your family decide to write directly to each other - this happens very rarely.

More information

If you need any further help or information please do not hesitate to contact the TCCU staff or one of the transplant co-ordinators on your next outpatient visit.

*Examples are shown on the reverse of this leaflet