

A Kidney Recipient's Plea for Organ Donation

Kidney Month Opinion Editorial

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Maribel Butts and Kyla Aquino Irving

In 2019, when I should have been celebrating my 18th kidney transplant anniversary, I was overwhelmed with survivor's guilt. My friend, Maribel, passed away waiting for a heart and kidney transplant.

There are more than 106,000 people on the national transplant waiting list with 92,000 (87%) waiting for a kidney. In California, nearly 80% of the people waiting are people of color, and 20% are Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI), like Maribel and me.

March is National Kidney Month, a time to consider your own health and learn about the health disparities in our own diverse community. This month provides an opportunity to educate the Sacramento region's ethnically diverse community—with significant Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Black populations—about kidney disease, risk factors, and calls to action.

According to the National Kidney Foundation, Black adults are almost four times more likely and Hispanic/Latino



Kyla Aquino Irving at Light Up 2024

adults are 1.3 times more likely to have kidney failure compared to White adults. And Filipino American adults have the highest proportional mortality, meaning we die of kidney failure more than twice than that of white adults and approximately 10% higher than Black adults.

And although people of color are aware of these health issues in our communities, many do not feel inspired to register as organ, eye, and tissue donors.

March is a significant month for me. I was diagnosed with end-stage kidney failure in March 1995 when I was just fifteen. Despite being a healthy and active teenager, my kidneys unexpectedly failed, requiring dialysis to keep me alive. I was blessed to receive a kidney transplant from my father and another six years later from my mother. Thanks to these two lifesaving transplants, I've had 30 more years of life, allowing me to graduate high school and college, get married, travel, and even have a child.

In my 30 years as a transplant recipient and donation advocate, I have sadly outlived

friends who have died waiting for the gift of life. In my grief, I carry a feeling of obligation to prevent others from experiencing the same fate as Maribel. It is my mission to see an end to the organ transplant waiting list.

As part of Sierra Donor Services, our team has enlisted the support of several community partners to join this mission. We urge everyone to give the gift of life as an organ, eye, and tissue donor. One person can save up to eight lives, including two kidneys for people who are living on dialysis.

Let's end the organ transplant waiting list together and give hope to those who are waiting for a second chance. Please be a part of this lifesaving mission and register today at SierraDonor.org.