Glossary of Terms

For a kidney/pancreas transplant

You may hear many words and expressions that may be new to you as you learn more about the transplant process. The list of terms in this chapter may be helpful to transplant patients, their families or support persons, and living donors.

Antibody
A protein substance made by the body’s immune system in response to a foreign substance (called an antigen, see below). Antibodies help the body fight off antigens and make them inactive. This can include transplanted organs.

Allograft
A transplanted organ between 2 individuals of the same species (such as human), but with genetic differences.

Antigen
A foreign substance, such as a transplanted organ or a virus or bacteria from an infection, that triggers an immune response. This response stimulates antibody production and activates other cells that fight off the foreign substance.

Amylase
An enzyme produced by the pancreas. Amylase is measured to monitor how well a transplanted pancreas is functioning. Normally found primarily in the blood, it is also found and measured in the urine in bladder-drained pancreas transplant patients.

Bicarbonate
A chemical of your blood involved in acid-base balance. It is a base, or alkali, of your blood and is also called HCO₃. Patients who have a bladder-drained pancreas may lose excess amounts of bicarbonate in the urine, which can lead to acidosis (excess acid in the blood). Patients with a bladder-drained pancreas usually need supplements of sodium bicarbonate.
Biopsy
A procedure in which a small sample of a tissue or organ is removed and examined under a microscope to detect diseases or conditions such as rejection.

BUN
Stands for Blood Urea Nitrogen, a waste product normally excreted by the kidney. The BUN level in your blood is an indication of all waste products being generated by your body and how well your kidney is able to get rid of them. Your BUN level shows how well your kidney is working. It is also a marker of your nutritional status and how much fluid you have in your body.

Cadaveric donor
A person who has died recently and whose family has consented to donating their loved one’s organs for transplant.

Caregiver
The support person or persons who will help guide a transplant patient through the transplant process. Caregivers must be prepared to provide physical and emotional support to a patient before and after the transplant. They could be a family member, partner, or friend.

Catheter
A plastic or rubber tube passed into the body. One type may be used to drain urine from the bladder. Another type may be inserted into a blood vessel to allow access to the circulatory system.

Chronic allograft nephropathy
Also called chronic rejection. The gradual decline in kidney graft function that occurs after transplant. The cause is generally not specific; there are often several reasons for this gradual loss of kidney function.

Chronic renal failure
Permanent damage to both kidneys that cannot be reversed. It is treated by dialysis or transplantation.

CMV (Cytomegalovirus)
A virus that is common in the general population. Most adults who have been exposed to the virus do not develop CMV disease. The virus can become active if a person’s ability to fight infection is reduced (See “Immunosuppression.”) A transplant patient may develop fever, low white blood cell count, stomach problems, and other illnesses due to CMV.
Creatinine
A byproduct of muscle metabolism. Since your kidneys eliminate creatinine from your body, your creatinine level can be used to indicate how well your kidney is working. The creatinine value of your blood is watched closely after transplant as a marker of kidney function.

Cross-matching
A blood test of compatibility between the potential donor’s blood and a prospective recipient’s blood. A positive cross-match shows that the donor and patient are incompatible. This means the recipient’s body would reject the transplant. A negative cross-match means there is no reaction between donor and patient and that the transplant may proceed.

Delayed graft function
The slow recovery (“waking-up”) of a transplanted organ. This process may take days to weeks.

Diastolic
The bottom number of the 2 numbers in a blood-pressure reading.

Endocrinologist
A doctor who specializes in treating patients with diabetes and other hormonal diseases.

Graft
A transplanted organ or tissue (such as a kidney or pancreas).

Glucose
The type of sugar that the body uses for energy.

HLA
Stands for Human Leukocyte Antigen. HLAs are proteins found on the surface of all cells. They play a major role in allowing your immune system to identify what is yourself and what is foreign.

Hypertension
Another word for high blood pressure.

Immunosuppression
The process of reducing the body’s immune system responses to foreign objects or organisms such as bacteria, viruses, or transplanted organs or tissue.

Immunosuppressives or Immunosuppressants
Usually refers to the type of drugs used to artificially suppress the body’s immune system. They are also called anti-rejection medications.
Intravenous
Also abbreviated “IV.” Refers to fluids or medications that are injected into a vein through a needle or catheter.

Lymphocele
Lymph fluid that may collect near the transplanted organ. It is caused by lymph vessels that are damaged (usually from surgery) and cannot return lymph fluid back to the veins.

Lymphoma
A type of cancer of the lymph system.

Malignancy
Another term for cancer.

Mediset
A medication reminder system. Usually it is a box that is set up like a calendar, allowing you to organize your medications in advance to help you remember to take them.

Nephrologist
A doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating kidney disease.

Noncompliance
Failure to take medication or follow medical instructions. It may shorten the time a graft is able to work.

Patient Care Coordinator/Patient Services Specialist/Program Coordinator
Transplant team members who schedule pre- and post-transplant tests and appointments and can answer questions about your evaluation.

PCA
Stands for Patient Controlled Analgesia. A type of pain management used for a short time post-surgery. PCA uses a special IV pump that delivers pain medication on demand.

PRA
Stands for Panel of Reactive Antibodies. A blood test done before transplant in the recipient to test for “reactivity” to donor tissues. It helps indicate if there might be a problem finding a transplant donor. This may mean it will take longer to find a transplant.

Primary care provider (PCP)
Usually a non-specialist doctor who manages all of your medical problems. Your PCP may refer you to various specialists.
PTLD
Stands for *post-transplant lymphoproliferative disease*. A cancer of the lymph node or a lymphoma, most often seen in transplant recipients.

Rejection
The destruction of the graft by your immune system.

Renal
Having to do with or referring to the kidneys.

Stenosis
A narrowing of a blood vessel or drainage tube in the body.

Stent
An artificial tube or device placed in a vessel to keep it open or draining, such as a ureteral stent.

Systolic
The top number of the 2 numbers in a blood-pressure reading.

T-cell
A name for a specialized white blood cell that is involved in the rejection of a graft. Also known as a T-lymphocyte.

Tissue typing
A blood test that evaluates the closeness of the tissue match between an organ donor and an organ recipient. It is done before transplant.

Thrombosis
The formation or presence of a blood clot.

Transplant attending
The transplant surgeon (doctor) who is the primary surgeon who does transplant surgery. This person is responsible for the management and care of transplant patients.

Transplant coordinator
The transplant coordinator is a nurse who has specialized transplant training and skills. Your transplant coordinator is your resource for education, health care, and transplant care. This person helps the transplant team manage your care, from referral to the care you receive after your transplant.

Transplant nephrologist
A nephrologist (a doctor who specializes in treating kidney disease) who has specialized knowledge in transplantation. This team member helps manage transplant patients.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Transplant Services: 206-598-8881

Transplant renal fellow
A nephrologist (a doctor who specializes in treating kidney disease) who has completed their medical residency and is getting extra training in transplant medicine.

Transplant surgery resident
A surgeon (doctor) who provides most of the day-to-day medical care in the hospital after surgery.

Transplant fellow
A surgeon (doctor) who is receiving specialized training in transplant surgery. This doctor will help with your care in the hospital after the surgery.

UNOS
Stands for United Network for Organ Sharing. An organization that provides education about transplant and manages the waiting list for cadaveric organs. See page 17-4 in Chapter 17, “Resources,” for contact information.

Ureter
One of the 2 drainage tubes in your body that carries urine from each kidney to your bladder.

Urethra
The drainage tube in your body that carries urine from your bladder out of your body.

Waiting List
The national list of people who have been evaluated for transplant and are actively waiting for cadaveric organs.