Making the Most of the Gift of Life
fit for life!

SUPPORTING ACTIVE LIVES POST-TRANSPLANT

more transplant recipients, more active, more often...
from the couch to walking around the block...
from the block to 5kms...
improving fitness, health and well being.

Astellas, World Transplant Games Federation and Transplant Australia look forward to launching Fit for Life! Program soon.

This program aims to provide resources, research and advice regarding nutrition and physical activity post-transplant for transplant recipients.

We look forward to working with the transplant community to help meet future transplant challenges and improve transplant recipient and caregiver experiences.
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Transplant Nurses’ Association website:
www.transplantnurses.org.au

JOURNAL SUBMISSION DETAILS FOR 2023

For 2023 the Transplant Journal of Australasia (TJA) will be produced in August and December.

Papers are submitted to the Editorial Board, which provides feedback to the author prior to publishing. All papers will be sub-edited to journal style before publication – please refer to the Guidelines for Authors for more details on this and for detailed submission information.
EDITORIAL

Making the Most of the Gift of Life

DOI https://doi.org/10.33235/tja.32.1.2

Welcome to this edition of the TJA that celebrates the World Transplant Games (WTG) held earlier this year in Perth, Western Australia.

Over 1500 participants from all over the world took part in a variety of sporting endeavours. Recipients, donors and donor families celebrated in making the most of the gift of life and shared the wellness and camaraderie of the transplant journey.

Our guest editorial is written by Chris Thomas the CEO of Transplant Australia, a charity that supports the transplant journey and organises the transplant Games. Transplant Australia encourages physical activity and has a series of videos and tips to assist the transplant recipients maintain fitness for life.

There are two wonderful articles from transplant nurses who assisted at the WTG to ensure medical care was available for all the participants. The WTG provided a shared journey for the hardworking medical staff and a wonderful opportunity to see the positive joy that comes from a transplant.

Two recipients also share their experiences of the WTG and the fun and positivity that comes with participation in representing your country on the world stage, even if you have had a transplant.

Julie Reynolds in her article summarises the impact that COVID-19 has had on the transplant process in many ways and highlights the necessity for vigilance whilst moving forward positively.

The TNA national conference will be held in Sydney on 26–27 October with the themes of Inclusion, Diversity and Empowerment, so please starting planning your visit to Sydney!

A/P Louise Fuller and the Editorial Committee

Editorial Board

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Australian Team marching at World Transplant Games
World Transplant Games in Perth Western Australia

Chris Thomas
CEO, Transplant Australia

Keywords Transplant Australia, donor awareness, physical activity, celebrate


DOI https://doi.org/10.33235/tja.32.1.3-4

After 4 years in the making, through the COVID pandemic, extended Western Australian border closures and Australia cut off from the rest of the world, the World Transplant Games finally arrived in Perth in April.

Simple question. Was it worth all the preparations, the anguish of not knowing whether Australia would be open to the world, concerns over funding and finally, and importantly, fears about the safety of athletes with the pandemic lingering on? This response from Alana Prince, mum of Jake, one of the teenage liver recipients at the Games, gives the only answer we really needed to know:

As a parent, the growth of my teenager from when we first heard about the World Transplant Games, to his representing Australia and winning of three golds and one silver medal has just been astounding: his courage to accept his transplant, commitment to attempt and train in new sports (chronic health has always hindered this), meet so many new people, compete at an international level, and mature physically, emotionally and socially – it just blows my mind, we could not be prouder of who he has become. Thank you to Transplant Australia and the World Transplant Games Federation for such an incredible experience.

The purpose of the World Transplant Games, and its Australian edition, is multi-faceted. Of course, raising awareness of the benefits of organ and tissue donation and lifting registration rates is a high priority, as is thanking donors and their families for the gift of life. But equally important is helping recipients on their transplant journey. That involves assisting them train and improve their physical and mental wellbeing, as well as a certain amount of encouraging them to get out of their ‘comfort zone’.

It is essential they enter a ‘wellness’ mentality rather than the ‘illness’ mentality to which they have invariably been accustomed. Giving opportunity to young and old alike, almost 1,000 transplant recipients, aged from 4 to 82, from 46 countries, the World Transplant Games is an event like no other.

The Games also provided opportunities for donor families and living donors to celebrate their contributions. Supporters numbered in the hundreds and thoroughly enjoyed the week. It was also brilliant to have a dedicated team of health professionals and they too managed to get away from their busy clinics and get out of their comfort zone at the Games looking after a range of sporting injuries, fatigue and a small amount of COVID.

For Jake Prince, his Games journey started by dangling in a harness over Optus Stadium right through to carrying out media interviews and winning medals in cycling, athletics and swimming.

Other athletes also jumped out of their comfort zone:

- An accomplished swimmer and runner, liver transplant athlete Michelle Daley competed in cycling for the first time, winning two gold and a silver. Along with her other medals in swimming and athletics, she was named Outstanding Female Athlete of the Games.
- Heart recipient Merrell Carter defied all odds, getting discharged from hospital with medical clearance which would only allow her to compete in darts, a sport she had
never previously played. This didn’t stop her practising at home and finally winning gold.

- Teenager Isabelle Rigby, a heart–lung recipient, halved her time for the 100 metres while in training and won a bronze medal in the final.

Transplant Australia is proud of its achievements in delivering a world-class event celebrating the gift of life. Importantly, the Games was one of the first international events in the ‘green and gold decade’ to the Brisbane Olympics in 2032.

The Federal Assistant Minister for Health the Hon. Ged Kearney, had this to say:

> With over 1,500 participants, the Perth World Transplant Games was a resounding success. It shone a light on the lives of participants whose lives have been touched by organ and tissue donation, whether they are recipients, donors or donor families.

The final words should rest with Jake Prince himself on what he achieved:

> The emotion of representing Australia on the World Transplant Stage. The pride of honouring my donor by being able to set and achieve goals I never, ever thought possible. The celebration of every single competitor being so thankful to be alive. The encouragement of everyone from and to all competitors from so many nations. The friendships of meeting so many people who understood me in a way my normal peers just don’t get. The anticipation of being able to do it all again in two years’ time. Thank you, Perth for the most magical World Transplant Games experience and to Dresden 2025 I say “See you soon!”

Michelle Daley – Outstanding Female Athlete of the Games

Merrell Carter – heart transplant recipient and gold medal in darts
Whenever I sit down to write the National Executive Report for an edition of the TJA I find myself always wondering where the year has gone! This year is definitely no different.

The National Executive have been extremely busy these last 7 months. The legal requirements for Associations to continue to function on a national level changed last year. This required us to seek legal assistance in regards to structural changes of the association. For the TNA to continue on, we needed to register as a ‘company limited by guarantee’ with a charity / not for profit status.

As members will know, we held a Special meeting in June to discuss this process and hold a member vote as to whether to proceed. This voting was passed and we are now in the process of converting over to the new structure.

What does this mean for our members? In essence there is no change, it is structurally based around the formal workings of the Executive who become a formal Board of Directors. The TNA will continue to be committed to advancing opportunities to enable education, research and networking for our health professionals involved in transplantation. Our State branches will continue to function in the same way, with state-based education sessions held throughout the year as they have previously. This leads me to say thank you to all our State Executives who work tirelessly to provide further educational and networking opportunities to our members.

We have also been very busy with a website upgrade and hopefully the ‘new look’ will be up and live later in the year. It will be more streamlined and user friendly. At the same time, the bank also decided to upgrade their merchant facility software and this has led to our membership renewal and new members joining only able to use bank EFT processes and not credit card options. We apologise for this inconvenience and hope to have it rectified shortly.

The National Executive continue to be involved with various organisations. We continue to work with TSANZ at council meetings and look forward to a combined conference meeting in 2024. This will be a wonderful educational meeting for everyone. We have continued to represent TNA on the Transplant Advisory Group, VSEAC and other OTA organisations.

The national conference is being held in Sydney this year in October and I encourage all members to try to attend. After the difficult years we have had previously (not mentioning that virus by name!), it will be wonderful to get together face to face again. Melbourne last year provided a great start back into attending conferences again. I am sure we are all sick of the virtual meetings! The NSW committee have been working very hard to get a great program for us and I encourage you all to jump on the website for more information and REGISTER NOW!

This leads me to say thank you to our wonderful sponsors Astellas, Pharmacor and OTA. Without their ongoing support we would not be able to provide our educational opportunities to our members.

Please enjoy this edition of the TJA and I look forward to seeing everyone in Sydney!

Christine Ellis
TNA National Secretary

Reminder for 2023

TNA National Conference
Save the Date
Sydney
26–27 October 2023
VALE

Matty Hempstalk

With much sadness we farewell Matty Hempstalk, Transplant Australia’s national sports & membership manager, who passed away suddenly on 5 December 2022. Matty was known to many in the Association for his dedication to supporting the needs of transplant recipients. He was a friendly face at many TNA conferences and was actively involved in patient care, particularly in the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service. Transplant sport played a significant part of Matty’s life as both a competitive participant and later as an administrator with Transplant Australia where he was instrumental in preparations for the World Transplant Games in Perth. Matty’s mum Lois, his sister Melissa and family travelled from New Zealand to attend the World Transplant Games in Perth in April, providing much support and comfort to staff and teammates. Matty was passionate about helping transplant recipients to be physically active.

We are pleased that his legacy will continue through the Matty Hempstalk Live the Dream Scholarship supporting young transplant recipients to participate in sporting events of their choice. If you would like to support the scholarship, please visit Matty Hempstalk Live the Dream Scholarship (mycause.com.au)

Living with a Transplant video series: Help from Transplant Australia

Transplant Australia has a comprehensive Living with a Transplant program to help recipients of all solid organs post-transplant. It covers everything from the first few days to heading overseas on a holiday and everything in between.

There are eight videos examining the topics in detail:

- Introduction
- Before the Transplant
- The First Few Days
- Back into Life
- Getting Fit and Staying Active
- Understanding Medications
- Self-Care and Mental Wellbeing
- Transplant Friendly Foods

Visit Living with a Transplant Video Series – Transplant Australia. A great resource for all patients post-transplant.

www.transplant.org.au
Living with a Transplant

A NEW RESOURCE TO HELP RECIPIENTS IN THEIR TRANSPLANT JOURNEY.

More information visit www.transplant.org.au  Telephone 1800 827-757
ARTICLE

World Transplant Games 2023: a photo diary

Calina Ting
Clinical Nurse Consultant, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Perth, WA, Australia

Keywords medical volunteer, inspiration, busy

DOI https://doi.org/10.33235/tja.32.1.8-10

It wasn’t just the transplant recipients who were challenged at the World Transplant Games... I would never have imagined the extensive involvement of my role as a medical/nursing volunteer coordinator, and I must admit that it was quite a happy stressful week! I have enjoyed EVERY second of my 24th World Transplant Games journey. Here are a few photographic highlights.
Joining the DonateLife 5km fun run in Kings Park with the SCGH Neph-Run Team – ‘Urine Good Hands’

Yes, we are having lots of fun!

Caught in action by transplant patients and living kidney donors at the DonateLife fun run

The fun lasted all the way through to the closing ceremony, where I suddenly realised ‘Oh... this will be the last night wearing my red medical volunteer top’... I am glad that we managed to snap one last group photo with the top that we are all proud to wear.

The closing ceremony

To all my fellow medical and nursing volunteers
You guys are such an amazing bunch and influential! Thank you for bearing with the amount of email correspondence (from me) and being still able to fill the volunteer spots just like that! I will never forget sending a midnight email to call for a ‘flash photoshoot’ in front of our WTG banner and hoping to have some in attendance the next morning. The next day, you all showed up!

To all WTG participants
You guys are phenomenal! Your dedication in achieving goals and ability to stay focus and be surrounded by positive vibes/energy is contagious. Olympic Games standards for sure!

To all the supporters
You have shown me how you have endlessly and willingly supported your loved ones, cheerleading them through their transplantation journey and celebrating their achievements all the way through.

Supporters cheering on for participants during the DonateLife fun run
Finally, to our 24th World Transplant Games team, Transplant Australia Board of Directors and staff, including The Event Team

Thank you for making this event possible in Perth and involving me in the primary care drop-in medical clinic set-up and trusting me in recruiting medical and nursing volunteers for these clinics. I will not be able to forget any of these moments.

Thank you from the depth of my heart

Powered by gifts of life,

Calina Ting
Your 24th WTG medical/nursing volunteer coordinator

Follow the Transplant Nurses’ Association on Instagram

Search: transplantnursesassociation
Celebrating Transplantation – the 24th World Transplantation Games 2023, Perth, Western Australia

Clare Fazackerley
Nurse Practitioner, WA, Australia

Keywords medical volunteer, gift of life, world impact


DOI https://doi.org/10.33235/tja.32.1.11-13

The 24th World Transplant Games was held in Perth, Western Australia in April 2023, 45 years since it was first held in Portsmouth, UK in 1978. This was the third time the Games had been held in Australia and it was a unique opportunity for countries to unite behind the global message of needing more organ donors whilst celebrating the greatest gift of all – the gift of life.

Hosting over 1500 athletes from 45 countries, the Perth Games provided an opportunity for transplant recipients to enter a variety of sporting events whilst also providing a stage for raising public awareness on the benefits of organ donation.

As with so many world events, the COVID pandemic had resulted in the cancellation of the 2021 World Transplant Games, resulting in the 2023 Games being a highly anticipated event after a 4-year hiatus. Transplant Australia actively worked to secure the support of the entire community in preparing for and hosting the Games, including the West Australian government, charitable organisations, businesses and our own transplant community including our medical and nursing teams. Many staff and recipients volunteered whilst others were very keen to be a part of the action!

Approximately 12 of our WA heart transplant recipients put themselves forward as competitors, medical entry criteria were strict and sports choices were ‘recommended’ on ability, with advice from our cardiologists and exercise physiologists. There was a lot of negotiation; many were determined to be a part of the event at any cost – an initial request for medical clearance for the 100m sprint became an approval to play darts!

Prior to the commencement of the Games, the Gift of Life Baton was launched in October 2022 at Olympic House. The Baton was designed to act as a universal beacon between future World and Transplant Games. Designed and produced in Western Australia, the Baton is a gift by the Australian government and Transplant Australia to the world transplant community. The Baton covered 4,600kms, crossing through four states, the Nullarbor and the outback. It was presented to the Australian parliament in Canberra and the parliament of Western Australia before touring hospitals, including the transplant teams at Fiona Stanley Hospital, as well as sporting venues in Perth and surrounding regions.

The 7-day program started with the opening ceremony at Perth’s Optus stadium; several members of the Perth heart and lung team set out to welcome the competitors as the sun was setting over the Swan river. It was an emotional sight, hundreds of entrants walking behind their country’s flag, enthusiasm and cheers ringing in the air. The Australian team were the last and biggest competitor group, immaculately dressed in their uniforms emblazoned with indigenous art, proudly designed by one of our own heart recipients.

The cardiac transplant team Gift of Life Baton presentation

Australian uniforms, designed by Ken Farmer, heart recipient WA
The final group were announced before entering the stadium, and there was an immediate hush from the crowd. The group comprised of living donors, deceased donor families and friends. The respect for this group of incredible individuals was palpable; the crowd rose to their feet for a standing ovation, a truly memorable moment and one I will never forget. The impact of organ donation was evident for all to see, the reality of ‘one life can make so much difference to so many others’.

Over the next 6 days athletes competed in 17 different sports; our recipients won medals in cycling, athletics, swimming, and yes a gold in darts! One of our exercise physiologists, Lauren Chasland from Fiona Stanley Hospital, WA, had nominated herself as a volunteer attending the cycling day. Here is her account of her experience:

The day began with helping competitors get race ready, attaching bibs and timing chips all while hearing amazing stories of survival. As the competitors branched off into their age groups us volunteers took up our positions along the track to cheer them on! Throughout the day we assisted with removing timing chips, ensuring participants felt well at the end of their race and getting medals ready for presentation.

The absolute highlight of my day was seeing a young Australian man 2 years post-heart transplant compete. His determination and grit was awe-inspiring. Standing on the sideline watching him whizz past I couldn’t help but grin uncontrollably. I worked with this man two years earlier as his heart function began to decline and he was listed for transplant. Following the gift of life from an organ donor, he was given a second chance at life and I was lucky enough to also be able to be a part of his rehabilitation journey. Seeing him not only compete on the world stage but medal numerous times was a moment I will never forget.

Social and cultural events filled the after sports calendar. I was fortunate enough to be invited to perform with my band Cardiac Rhythm at the cultural evening. The evening was packed, so many smiles and cultures among the crowd, transplant recipients and their families enjoying Australian hospitality, there was a huge feeling of community and acceptance. Later that evening I found myself in front of the microphone looking up at a whale skeleton and watching a large quokka and transplant recipients from all over the world unite for music and dance. Quite a life moment!

Our medical team, whilst expecting to be called on to support and assist, particularly the heart transplant competitors, received just one call for help.

Lauren and Aaron Lee, heart recipient
requests for medications lost in transit never came. Nor did we have any significant recipient injuries.

On a personal note, I have been an integral part of the cardiac transplant program since the program’s introduction to Western Australia in November 1994. As a long-term member of the heart transplant team, I have shared many recipient journeys and witnessed first-hand the life changing difference transplantation offers. I was proud to be invited to be a part of the World Transplant Games; however, I wasn’t prepared for how emotional and life affirming I would find watching the interactions and achievements of recipients from all corners of the world.

The biggest impact has, however, come in the weeks to follow as recipients have presented to clinic requesting that I forward their medals to donor families. It seems to me they have found the perfect way to acknowledge and celebrate their greatest gift — the gift of life.

Cardiac Rhythm, WA Museum cultural evening

The Transplant Nurses’ Association is on Facebook

‘Like’ us on Facebook

for all updates on the national conference, educational activities and transplant-related issues.
**Patient Experiences of World Transplant Games 2023**

*Jade Mitchell*

**Keywords** giving back, transplant recipient, gratitude


**DOI** https://doi.org/10.33235/tja.32.1.14-15

**Making the most of the gift of life**

I have cystic fibrosis (CF) which is the most common life-limiting genetic condition in Australia. I was born in the ‘70s when the life expectancy of someone with CF was a teenager. CF is a life-long illness that has required constant management my entire life. The condition and symptoms can vary amongst those with CF but most commonly we experience regular lung infections resulting in regular 1–2 weeks at a time of hospitalisation where I’d be given strong intravenous antibiotics for a pretty gross and severe cough, difficulty breathing, effort exercising, trouble with digestion, salty sweat due to the defective salt transfer in our cells and a high risk of CF-related diabetes. Throughout my life, CF was not an excuse to do less but rather a reason to have to do more.

I have lived my entire life managing my health and living my life around hospital admissions. How CF is managed is imperative; however, how it affects each person is uncontrollable. I believed that CF didn’t really change my life too much nor how I lived my life. However, I can now recognise after becoming much sicker and experiencing a transplant I know that CF has most certainly played a major role in how I lived my life. Working regular hours in full-time jobs was near impossible with the number of hospital admissions I have had over the years and therefore I had to be in flexible working environments with understanding employers. As transplant approached I had to quit working for others and focus on my health; it became a full-time effort doing airway physio so I launched a thermal drink bottle business that I could operate from the hospital or wherever I was. As my transplant became closer, I was unable to keep up the duel effort required to build my business any further.

In 2018 at the age of 40 I was fortunate enough to receive the gift of organ donation, receiving a double lung transplant. After the transplant I was in hospital for 8 weeks post-surgery and had a fair few complications and problems arise. The team at the Alfred Hospital in Victoria presented me with ‘next steps’ and I took on each hurdle with a positive attitude. I was so appreciative of the high skills and level of care provided by everyone who looked after me. Some people are out of hospital quickly, others take longer. The team have seen and tackled plenty of post-surgery situations. I tried to take each day as it came. I took a few backward steps experiencing early rejection, blood clots, spontaneous pneumothorax, excess fluid and drains. The setbacks seemed consistent; however, despite this, it felt like the overall baseline of my wellbeing was, for the first time in many years, making progress. Unlike with CF hospital admissions where I would be an in-patient for 8+ weeks and be home only 2 weeks before going back into hospital again, I was out of hospital and breathing better than ever, making physical gains with exercising and, although there were other issues that were not great, I had hope they would resolve in time, something I knew my CF would not do.

Despite my most difficult set back in 2019 where I got a virus and was in a coma in ICU for 40 days with a final diagnosis of acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) I have now fully recovered and have been going from strength to strength.

During my second hospital rehab (and knowing every company in Aus had now done a thermal drink bottle) my observations were confirmed from my first stint in the rehab gym – it was clear the gym can be intimidating for anyone and new routines are difficult to regulate. Many transplanters, due to their terminal illness have not had the ability to attend a gym. Like with CF, it is imperative to do all you can to look after yourself and your new life changing gift post-transplant. It was clear that looking good helped with feeling good.
Helping a stranger is as simple as switching brands. I came up with a ‘give back’, activewear brand TX ACTIVE. The idea: to sell activewear to the masses and with the profits gift the same clothing items from the range to organ transplant recipients in rehab to motivate them in their new active life. Activewear is readily available and everyone is wearing it but it is an expense that after transplant is not a priority. Terminally ill people have often experienced long periods of underemployment, as have their primary careers who are most often a spouse or close family member.

I launched TX ACTIVE via a kickstarter campaign and have gifted to many transplant recipients over nearly 2 years. I introduced myself to Transplant Australia and as a result they asked me if I would be interested in helping design and manufacture the Australian team’s parade uniforms for the World Transplant Games. The Games were in Perth Australia in March earlier this year. It was a fabulous experience. Transplant Australia and I were excited to create something new and versatile for our Aussie team. My design was influenced by the Australian bush landscape. I wanted to incorporate the gum leaf and snow gum colours, vibrant yellow of wattle as well as acknowledging First Nations Indigenous Australians. I incorporated artwork by fellow transplant recipient, First Nations indigenous artist Ken Farmer and was very happy with how the uniforms turned out.

The Games were a truly amazing experience. I competed at the Games in swimming. I figured I couldn’t be doing the uniforms and not be involved! Even though I had not swum in completion swimming carnival since I was 15 years old and hadn’t been able to swim fast or any significant distance for many years, it was a great goal for me to train for. My fitness and health benefitted, and the enjoyment and spirit of the World Transplant Games is phenomenal. The camaraderie and friendships made are unique and very special. Everyone there is living life to their fullest with an amazing attitude.

Receiving a double lung transplant is something I will be forever grateful for every day for the rest of my life. I am blessed to be living a life that I will try and get the most out of. Not only for myself but for the amazing generosity of my donor and their family. Also for the many young CF people who have managed their CF health as well as me but were not as fortunate, like my brother who passed away in 2005 aged 24.

There are 1800 people currently on a waitlist for an organ. If you are not an organ donor, please consider signing on. It takes 1 minute. It is very rare to pass under circumstances that would make someone viable to be an organ donor but the seven lives you could save and countless thankful people you would touch as a result would never be forgotten. Have the discussion and talk your friends and family.

Jade Mitchell
I first saw it when reading an email from Transplant Australia. I had signed up to become a TA member in November 2021 knowing and hoping for a kidney transplant sometime soon. I have had kidney disease since I was born and was told this time was coming. So while we were preparing the transplant work up and getting ready for dialysis, I thought it would be good to stay informed but also join a community of people who know what this is all about.

In December saw an email about the Australian Transplant Games being cancelled. I had no idea this even existed! I've always loved sport, tennis in particular. I grew up watching my Dad play and played it myself since I was 5 years old. The tennis court was my happy place. So seeing that there were Games was exciting.

Then in April 2022 I heard about the World Transplant Games in Perth. By this time I had received a kidney transplant thanks to an incredibly generous friend and the Kidney Exchange Program. I saw the Games as a goal to work towards which would get me active and moving post-transplant. I also saw it as a way to celebrate life and the donors who give people like me a second chance.

Tennis was an obvious choice. I loved playing it and was keen to get back onto the court after having to give it up for a while. I put together a training plan and found a supportive coach who understood what I was working towards and why it mattered. My wife and three girls jumped on the bandwagon by joining me down at the courts, keeping me moving and motivated.

Perth was going to be my first World Transplant Games, my first big trip after my transplant as well as the first competitive tennis I had played in a long time. I had no idea what the level of competition would be like. I could only train as best I could and give it a red hot crack. It wasn’t about winning, as nice as that would have been. It was about being part of something bigger that really mattered. I was looking forward to celebrating what other people have overcome and hear their stories.

I fundraised, we purchased flights, booked accommodation and were supported along the way by the amazing team at Transplant Australia.

What I and my family experienced was way beyond our expectations. Team Australia was an incredible group of individuals all bonded by a shared experience. We met and made new friends. All of my family were inspired by the people who openly shared their transplant experience. We swapped stories of diagnoses, surgeries, recovery challenges, medication side effects and supportive family and friends. Some were hilarious, others sobering and most spoken of with a humble reverence and depth of gratitude that comes from being alive to tell them.

There was an inspiring and emotional parade of nations and opening ceremony. The competition itself was great fun. After the nerves settled down I enjoyed myself and the challenge of competing again. All the athletes were encouraging and friendly. I lost a few matches and won a few. I was tired and sore but the physiotherapists made sure we were looked after. After 2 days of competition I managed to come home with a bronze in both singles and doubles.

More importantly, I came home knowing that transplant provided a return to the things I loved. I came home knowing there were others, who are now friends, who know what the journey is like and are happy to walk with you along it. The Transplant Australia Family, as Chris Thomas calls it, is exactly that. I also came back realising the value of having a goal to work towards and something to look forward to.

The privilege of representing Australia at the World Transplant Games provided me with a platform to promote the gift of life that everyday heroes provide to people. Those heroes are the doctors, nurses, specialists, admin staff, donors, supporters and families that make this journey possible. They are the reason that those on dialysis and waiting lists can read about the Transplant Games and even think about perhaps being part of it one day. So thank you and see you at the Australian Games in 2024 or World Games in Germany in 2025.
The Impact of COVID-19 in the Transplant Arena

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Keywords renal transplant, outpatient, psychological, barriers


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COVID-19 came to Australia in January 2020. COVID-19 was rapidly spreading throughout Australia and, indeed, was encompassing the globe. Such was the spread of the disease that on 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. By 21 March 2020, there were 11,252 deaths worldwide attributed to the novel coronavirus reported. Now, in 2023, we realise in hindsight that COVID-19 has been a significant marker in people's lives, a sentiment echoed by Goldfeld et al. who acknowledge that COVID-19 has had a significant life-long impact. It is a "before & after" type moment that is identifiable to us all. Thus, whether it has been a personal experience and/or a professional experience, the impact of COVID-19 has, no doubt, been a defining time in everyone's life, especially so for the transplant recipient cohort.

Indeed, COVID-19 presented stressors for all people, but especially those within the transplant population. It encompassed all spectrums of the transplant journey from the moment a person is placed on a transplant waiting list, through to the time the person received a donor organ, and extended to the post-transplant time where they were placed on on-going immunosuppression therapies to prevent organ rejection.

Thus, in an attempt to address the impact of COVID-19 within the transplant arena, it may help to review the events and how it affected transplantation recipients and health systems in Australia.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, people who had received a donor organ knew they were faced with the fact that being immunocompromised heightened their risk of contracting COVID-19. Specifically, the renal transplant cohort who are on higher immune suppressive therapy initially post-transplantation, did have reason for concern. It was reported in international data that, for the older diabetic renal population, mortality related to COVID-19 in renal transplant recipients was greatest in patients 75 years or older with a primary renal disease of diabetes mellitus. This represented a large portion of the people commencing dialysis as diabetes is the leading cause of chronic renal disease.

Added to this, health authorities also recognised the increased risk of contracting COVID-19 amongst renal transplant patients and implemented immunisation requirements for transplant recipients and their families. To explain further, the health of close contacts of transplant patients was also a consideration in immunising against COVID-19 because the risk of COVID-19 transmission amongst the families of renal immunocompromised recipients was high and so this was undertaken to promote greater protection for a vulnerable population.

Not only was there the increased fear of contracting COVID-19 and an increased need for immunising the transplant population, but the effects of COVID-19 rippled further. Transplantation services within Australia were affected. The Australian government Organ and Tissue Authority (OTA) reported a 12% decrease in the number of people receiving a transplant. For renal transplantation, which makes up more than half of the organs transplanted, transplantation decreased by 18% in 2020 from the previous year.

The reasons that COVID-19 impacted on transplantation rates was multifactorial. Firstly, it affected patient movement across borders due to quarantine requirements. Quarantine and cross border travel varied between states and territories in Australia and people were required to meet the criteria for entry into the state they were travelling to. This is a significant consideration when not all states and territories transplant all organs, and therefore necessitates intrastate travel for recipients of heart, lung and liver organs.

Secondly, there was a shift in organ access as the availability and movement of organs across borders was also impacted. Lockdowns in states and territories were introduced as a means to slow COVID-19 spreading through communities because social isolation and social distancing are known to be effective at reducing COVID-19 infection. Thus, in limiting cross border travel of people and hence the spread...
of COVID-19, cross border travel of donor organs was also impacted.

Thirdly, the transplantation process was impacted by elective surgery suspension. Elective surgery restrictions came in to play to ensure that hospitals could meet the demand of an increasing hospitalisation rate because of the pandemic. Added to this, elective surgery suspension varied between states. Organs were given to the best match intrastate rather than interstate so as not to lose a valuable resource. For South Australia (SA), elective surgery restrictions were not in place as long as Victoria which meant renal transplantation within SA was able to continue with less disruption to their renal transplantation program.

A fourth impact of COVID-19 was the effect on outpatient appointments. Within renal, if transplantation was undertaken, there was a change to how outpatient appointments were conducted in that, if able, appointments went to a virtual connection. However, for the early post-transplantation period, follow up requirements necessitated face to face sessions.

Responses varied across differing organ transplantation teams. The lung transplant team in SA responded with extra clinical support by forming a 24-hour contact phone number whereby the lung transplant recipient could be provided with a clinical support team to provide best care and fast track treatment therapies required. This was in answer to reports which showed an international increase in mortality of 45% in lung transplant recipients during this time.

Thus the impact of COVID-19 on the transplant population and their families caused angst and uncertainty – even more so than the ‘usual’ roller coaster ride a transplant recipient faces. It is a psychological impact which then has physiological responses.

To further explain the psychological effect transplant recipients face, double lung transplant recipient Wendy Jenkins (personal communication at the Transplant Nurses’ Association (TNA) national conference, 7 October 2022, Melbourne) recounted the story of a double lung transplant recipient and the journey that occurs from living with uncertainty. Wendy further explained that transplantation offers hope too, but that it is mixed with much uncertainty as the course post-transplantation may mean navigating opportunistic infections and the possibility of rejection of the organ. And while both Wendy Jenkins and Dr Naomi Katz, AYA palliative care in transplant (personal communication at the TNA national conference, 7 October 2022, Melbourne) recognised that there is “…value in acknowledging uncertainty,” it is the “navigating hope, trust and uncertainty” that is an ongoing source of stress.

It is within this parallel, living with the ambiguity of positive outcomes and dealing with constant unknowns, that COVID-19 added another layer of worry. Indeed, “the initial impacts of the pandemic increased levels of psychological distress…”1 because of the implementation of multiple lockdowns necessitated to slow COVID-19 spreading and to prevent amplifying significant health impacts upon older and vulnerable communities, but which caused interruptions to health service deliveries.

Jenkins outlined how the psychological effects of stress impact upon the body and the physiological changes that then occur. That is, the body responds to the impact of uncertainty with the pre-frontal cortex interacting with the limbic brain. The pre-frontal cortex controls higher level processes such as logical thinking and planning2 which is influenced by the limbic system which contains the hippocampus, a structure critical in human memory (W. Jenkins; personal communication at the TNA national conference, 7 October 2022, Melbourne). It can then be seen that the interplay between the pre-frontal cortex and the limbic brain as a result of a stressor translates to physiological responses such as memory issues, an increased inability to concentrate, racing thoughts, difficulty in speaking and hypervigilance. As such, uncertainty is more stressful than imminent defeat. Added to this, ongoing stressors shrink the hippocampus which can result in increased negative thoughts (W. Jenkins; personal communication at the TNA national conference, 7 October 2022, Melbourne) which perpetuates a negative cycle. Interestingly, COVID-19 may further compound these issues, as early studies show that even mild cases of COVID-19 may have the same impact on thinking skills and memory3 as stress does (N. Katz; personal communication at the TNA national conference, 7 October 2022, Melbourne).

So, how can we best help support the transplant population? Support can be through utilising strategies to assist in reducing heightened emotions. These include focusing on breathing and regulating different types of breathing patterns, along with keeping a gratitude journal writing and focusing on positive thoughts. Another strategy includes reappraising emotions. This means looking at how you respond and how you choose to respond. Thus a stress response can be dissected and interpreted differently so that the upgraded response has a positive focus. All of these examples require recognition of responses and then ‘re-wiring’ of thought processes to respond differently and to choose one thought pattern over another.

Besides approaching COVID-19 by acknowledging the psychological impact, there is the evolving knowledge behind medical therapies to treat COVID-19. These therapies have been rapidly evolving as the understanding of COVID-19
grows and as COVID-19 variants evolve. Ongoing treatment therapies initially utilised included monoclonal therapies. However, this group of drugs lacked the ability to provide broader specificity to elicit antibodies to all variants of COVID-19. Current treatments include remdesivir and paxlovid.

However, even with evolving treatments, many vulnerable Australians continue to live in fear of contracting COVID-19. Key findings in a survey conducted by AstraZeneca (2022) regarding immunocompromised Australians and their carers found that some of the transplant population limit attendance at social events to minimise their exposure to COVID-19.

In summary, regardless of whether you have had COVID-19, or whether you have had it more than once, or maybe for some who haven’t had it at all, the impact of COVID-19 has reverberated throughout the world with a rippling effect throughout health systems and peoples’ lives, especially for the transplant population. COVID-19 is seen as such a significant event for both health personnel, the health system and the transplant population. There is the time before COVID-19 and after, and its influence has filtered through to changed practices of nurses, physicians and patients. Indeed, COVID-19 has challenged conventional modalities of healthcare delivery in the health system and is here to stay.

Conflict of interest
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Funding
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References
Keynote Speakers

Professor Munjed Al Muderis
Orthopaedic surgeon and a clinical lecturer at Macquarie University and The Australian School Of Advanced Medicine. Professor Al Muderis specialises in hip, knee, trauma and osteointegration surgery. A former refugee, he is now a fellow of the Royal Australian College of Surgeons, Chairman of the Osteointegration Group of Australia, and in 2020, Professor Al Muderis was named NSW Australian of the Year.

Ms Sarah Morse
With over 20 years experience as a nurse, specialising in cancer services, palliative care, end of life and as a humanitarian, Sarah brings a global perspective to healthcare. She is known for her deep commitment to nursing the human spirit. Through her personal experience of burnout, Sarah believes that empowering people to thrive in the workplace is pivotal to a healthy workforce. In 2004 Sarah was named NSW Young Australian of the Year.

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