A day in the life of a MUSC transplant surgeon

Posted: Oct 01, 2009 4:28 PM EDT
Updated: Oct 01, 2009 4:32 PM EDT

By Bob Behanian | email

CHARLESTON, SC (WCSC)-MUSC transplant surgeon Charles Bratton doesn't get much sleep. There just isn't enough time. Between surgeries and patients he's always on the run.

MUSC performs between 150 and 180 kidney transplants a year. Most of them by the hands of Dr. Bratton. There is a reason kidney failure has become a big problem among S. Carolinians.

"We have a very high rate of hypertension and diabetes."

Those diseases are a reason why so many transplants are necessary. Surgeons don't just see the patient when they are about to get a transplant. They work with them from the beginning.

"One of the pleasures of our job is we get to see patients at all aspects of the process. We get to start off at days like this morning. We talk to patients before they come to transplant."

In order to get put on the waiting list the patient must first meet with Dr. Bratton. Once on the list there is no telling how long a patient has to wait, though MUSC has the shortest kidney wait time in the country. Like the patient, Dr. Bratton has no idea when the organ will become available. When it does, he immediately lets them know and that's one of the best parts of his job.

"It's extremely gratifying. The excitement and relief for the patient and the family. It's tremendous."

After the call the surgeon will personally pick up the organ, usually by helicopter. Time is crucial.

"Each organ has a specific amount of time. The shorter the time. The better the outcome."

After the transplant Dr. Bratton will regularly meet with the recipient. As one name is taken off the list, more are added. The success of transplants has grown but so has the need for organs.

"The need for transplantation cannot be overstated. Wait list times get longer, with more patients added to the list. And there are people who die waiting for transplants."