

# Man who gave kidney to brother: ‘I didn’t think of any other thing except to help save him’

Brothers share unexpected journey from their love of sports to a kidney transplant

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When former national bowler Carl de Vries was diagnosed with kidney disease and needed a transplant, his brother Marc did not hesitate to offer him one of his.

Mr Marc de Vries, 45, who is also a former national bowler, said: “He’s family. He’s my brother. I didn’t think of any other thing except to help save him.”

Now, about a year after the procedure, his brother Carl, 42, has recovered well enough to compete in April’s Singapore Transplant Games, where those who have had an organ transplant come together to compete in various sports.

The brothers’ journey from sharing their love of sports to sharing a kidney transplant experience was an unexpected one.

Carl, who runs a gym and is married with no children, had always led a very active life, playing various racket games, such as tennis and badminton, three times a week and bowling once a week. He was a gold medalist at the 2006 Asian Bowling Championships.

In 2018, he underwent a routine health check and found that he had autosomal dominant polycystic kidney disease. The genetic disease is one where multiple cysts form in the kidneys, leading to kidney damage and failure.

Carl, the second of three children, said: “I was very shocked, as there is no history of kidney failure

in my family.”

There were no symptoms that made him think he was ill in the beginning. But life became more taxing as his kidney function deteriorated over time.

In the two years before he had the transplant in January 2024, he felt tired all the time.

Climbing the overhead bridge felt like a 100m sprint, and he had to take a break after playing tennis for 10 minutes, whereas, in the past, he could go on for at least an hour.

Dr Hersharan Kaur Sran, medical director of the Adult Kidney Trans-

**Pre-emptive transplants are uncommon in Singapore, as such transplants are only possible here when the patient has found a living donor. It also requires timely referral before the patient reaches end-stage kidney disease, said Dr Hersharan Kaur Sran, medical director of the Adult Kidney Transplantation Programme at the National University Centre for Organ Transplantation.**

plantation Programme at the National University Centre for Organ Transplantation (Nucot), said that when she first saw Carl in 2023, he had advanced chronic kidney disease, which is just one stage before kidney failure.

The centre is at the National University Hospital (NUH).

Dr Hersharan suggested that he undergo a pre-emptive kidney transplant, where the transplant is done before the patient starts dialysis to remove the extra fluid and waste from the body when the kidneys fail.

She said a pre-emptive kidney transplant offers patients the best outcomes, as the patients and their kidneys survive the longest period of time, compared with transplants done after the patient has been on dialysis for some time.

However, pre-emptive transplants are uncommon in Singapore, as such transplants are only possible here when the patient has found a living donor. It also requires timely referral before the patient reaches end-stage kidney disease, Dr Hersharan said.

For example, there were only 82 pre-emptive kidney transplants done at Nucot in the 37 years between 1987, when the first kidney transplant was performed at NUH, and 2024, she said.

In 2024, Singapore saw a total of 103 kidney transplants – with 57 cases where the organ was donated by a living donor and 46 from a dead donor.

The average wait time for patients who received a kidney from a dead donor was 97 months, or around eight years, according to a website by the National Organ Transplant Unit.

Carl said eight or nine of his bud-



Former national bowler Carl de Vries received a new lease of life through a kidney transplant from his brother in January 2024. Come April, he will be competing in badminton in the Singapore Transplant Games. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH



Mr Marc de Vries (seated, second from left) and Mr Carl de Vries with Dr Hersharan Kaur Sran (right) and their medical team from National University Hospital. PHOTO: NATIONAL UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

Previously, he had represented Singapore at the World Bowling Championship in 1999, as well as in other international tournaments.

He said: “My kidney function is OK and everything is OK (after the transplant). But I feel tired more easily now.”

Carl says he feels almost back to “100 per cent” now in terms of his energy levels, and life is so much better.

On April 5, Carl is competing at the Singapore Transplant Games – in badminton, instead of bowling, as he wants to challenge himself in a sport he is “not good” at.

Dr Matthew D’Costa, who is the vice-president of the Society of Transplantation (Singapore), said the society and the transplant centres at NUH and Singapore General Hospital organise the Singapore games once every two years.

More than 70 competitors will be competing in seven games, such as track and field, table tennis, bowling and tennis.

Winners of the Singapore games are traditionally selected to take part in the World Transplant Games, which will be next held in August in Germany.

dies offered to be tested to see if they could donate their kidneys to him.

Marc, who runs a tyre business and lives in Dubai, also came forward to be a donor.

He had to go through a series of tests in Dubai and at NUH to ensure he was suitable. He does not have the genetic kidney disease that his brother suffered from.

Carl said: “I’m very grateful, as it’s a big sacrifice on his part.”

And even though they were “not the closest of siblings” before, his illness has strengthened their bond, Carl said.

Marc added: “We are opening up to each other more now. Maybe that came naturally after the transplant.”

The transplant was done in January 2024 at NUH. Their doctors say the brothers are doing well after the procedure.

A person has two kidneys and a healthy person can function just as well with just one kidney, after donating one.

Marc, who is married and expecting the birth of his first child in August, said that he is back to playing golf three or four times a week, among the activities he loves.

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