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## When a Kidney Doctor Becomes a Kidney Donor

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Arjang Djamali

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## **When a Kidney Doctor Becomes a Kidney Donor**

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I met John in the clinic in Wisconsin in 2014. He was diagnosed with stage 3 CKD. Over time, we established a unique and lasting friendship, but John's kidney disease progressed, and he was going to need a transplant. I had accepted a new position as chair of department of medicine in Maine. Before leaving Wisconsin, I called John. I said, "John, I know of a potential living kidney donor with the same blood type B". He said "Oh! Yes? Who?" It turned out we were also fully matched for HLA class II. The man from Clintonville, WI and the man from Tehran, Iran, were like brothers.

*The sons of Adam are members of a whole,  
In creation of one essence and soul.  
If one member is afflicted with pain,  
Other members uneasy will remain.  
If you've no sympathy for human pain,  
The name of human you cannot retain*

*Saadi Shirazi*

We put things in motion. My transplant coordinator expertly aligned all the stars. Josh Mezrich and Dixon Kaufman, my friends and colleagues in Wisconsin agreed to form the surgical team. My new boss in Maine said "That's admirable. Tell me how I can help, and good luck!" After surgery, I remember someone waking me up saying "Dr. Djamali, can you hear me? It's all over, everything went well!" I stroked the binder on my abdomen. I felt elated. The moments of anxiety were gone. I went to see John that evening. He was awake, joking, and making loads of urine. As a transplant nephrologist you love to see that. Especially when it involves your own kidney. I was discharged home the next morning. John was discharged on day five. His serum creatinine was 1.1 mg/dL; mine was 1.5 mg/dL. John named the kidney "Little A". At home, my wife was my rock. I flew back to Portland two weeks after surgery. I had already resumed work on post-op day two, courtesy of virtual meetings.

As I reflect on this transformational personal and professional experience, I realize I am not a super-hero or a saint. I am a kidney transplant doctor who walked the walk. I am fortunate to tell the story, and John and I hope that sharing this experience will encourage people to consider living kidney donation. There are 90,000 of our brothers and sisters waiting for a kidney transplant in the United States.

Figures.



- A. Josh Mezrich, MD, and me, before nephrectomy
- B. Dixon Kaufman, MD, PhD, and me, after John's surgery
- C. John and me, after John's surgery
- D. My right kidney, *ex vivo*