



MEDIA ADVISORY

Contacts: Kristen Newcomer

knewcomer@jpshealth.org

817-702-1610

Diana Carroll

dcarro01@jpshealth.org

817-702-1227

J.R. Labbe

jlabbe@jpshealth.org

817-702-1616

Hand transplant reunion, update

March 17, 2014, Fort Worth — Indiana farmer and hand transplant recipient Ronnie Thurman will be at JPS on April 1, together with Rob and Janis Heidemann of Keller, whose son provided Thurman's right hand. They will share their stories with members of the medical community, along with Dr. Tae Chong, a transplant surgeon starting hand transplants in D/FW. Mayor Betsy Price will open the program.

Ronnie Thurman and Rob Heidemann will raise the Donate Life Flag together on campus following the panel program.

Among those attending will be Dr. W. P. Andrew Lee of Johns Hopkins, a pioneer in hand transplantation. Lee, who did the first double-hand transplant, is chair of the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Hand transplants remain rare, but rapid progress is being made. Along with face and other limb transplants, they are known as vascular composite allografts and are considered experimental surgery. Much of the work is funded by the military, which is pioneering limb-replacement procedures on behalf of the 1,500-plus troops who lost limbs to improvised explosive devices in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"This is the ultimate in reconstructive surgery," said Chong, who leads a new hand transplant program at UT Southwestern Medical Center.

Thurman, 58, lost his right hand in a combine accident and underwent a hand transplant at Jewish Hospital in Louisville, Ky., on Feb. 16, 2012.

(more)



Rob and Janis Heidemann lost their 22-year-old son, Ian, on Feb. 14, 2012, five days after a car accident left him with a head injury from which he could not recover. He was a patient at the Level I Trauma Center at JPS. Ian Heidemann had registered as an organ and tissue donor, and his parents consented to donation of his right hand. Ian's hand was the first ever retrieved by LifeGift, the organ procurement organization for North, Southeast and West Texas, and only the second ever donated in Texas.

After many months of painstaking rehabilitation, Thurman is able to use his right hand to do all of the work involved in running his family farm. "The hand goes to work every day," he says. "It's a wonderful thing."

Thurman told LifeGift that he wanted to come to Fort Worth to express his gratitude, for the generosity of Ian Heidemann and his parents, and for the dedication to organ and tissue donation that made his new hand possible. Among all U.S. hospitals, JPS was fourth in the nation in 2013, providing organs for 164 transplants, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS.) Ian Heidemann provided a new heart for a 43-year-old man, kidney for a 3-year-old boy, lungs for a 65-year-old man, pancreas and kidney for a 41-year-old woman, liver for a 65-year-old woman, and corneas and other tissue for dozens of others.

Thurman's primary goal was to return to work. But something else he sorely missed was his hobby, golf. He was recently able to swing a club for the first time since losing his hand, and will get the chance to play at the Colonial Golf Course during his visit to Fort Worth.

Thurman's transplant was performed by surgeons of the Louisville Vascular Composite Allograft Program in Kentucky, who did the nation's first successful hand transplant in 1998. The number of hand transplant centers has since grown to at least six. The federal government is moving to add hands and other vascular composite allografts to the definition of transplantable organs, which would put them under the same regulatory umbrella as more commonly transplanted organs such as hearts and kidneys. In January, the federal Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network announced creation of an 18-member scientific committee to explore issues such adding limbs and faces to the organs covered by standard driver's license consent for donation.

April 1 events

Transplant Panel Program 11:30 a.m.

Outpatient Building Auditorium, 1500 S. Main St.

Flag Raising 1 p.m.

Swati Gandhi Memorial Prayer Garden (across Main Street)