

Louisiana's Only Living-Donor Liver Transplant Center

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The liver is the only organ in the body that can regenerate itself. This biological fact ? combined with the nationally acknowledged expertise of the physicians in the Tulane Abdominal Transplant Institute ? has saved hundreds of lives in the last decade.



Dr. Sander Florman is director of the Tulane Abdominal Transplant Institute. (Photo by Will Crocker)

The institute, founded in 1997, offers state-of-the-art services to adults and children with liver and/or kidney disease. And it is unique in Louisiana. Tulane is the state's only living-donor transplant center approved by the United Network for Organ Sharing, the national registry that facilitates organ procurement and transplantation.

Tulane surgeons have had outstanding success performing both kidney and liver transplants for children, says Dr. Sander Florman, director of the transplant institute.

“Live donor liver transplantation has revolutionized pediatric liver transplant over

the last 10 years,” Florman says, noting that advanced techniques allow him and his colleagues to take a piece of the liver from a living donor and transplant it into a child.

“The liver is the only organ that can regenerate,” says Florman, an associate professor of surgery and pediatrics. “Based on that, we take a small piece, around 25 percent, of an adult's liver, transplant this piece into a child, and the liver re-grows in both the recipient and in the donor.”

The Tulane team also has performed split liver transplants, in which a liver from a deceased donor is divided. The larger portion is transplanted into an adult and the smaller part into a child, saving the lives of two recipients.

“These innovative techniques have saved many children's lives,” Florman says. “Before living donor and split liver transplants, there just weren't enough organs for all the small children in need of them.”

The multidisciplinary group of the transplant institute has four surgeons, including Dr. Douglas Slakey, chair of the Department of Surgery, as well as two nephrologists (kidney specialists) and three hepatologists (liver specialists), including Dr. Luis Balart, chief of gastroenterology.

“Our hepatology group has a combined clinical experience of more than 70 years,” Florman says.

The expertise and teamwork of staff members at the [Tulane Abdominal Transplant Institute](#) add significant benefits to patient care. Staff in the unit at [Tulane Medical Center](#) are highly specialized — transplant nurses, a transplant pharmacist and a transplant dietician, for example — because transplant patients, particularly liver patients, have a lot of specific needs.

A key to the success of the institute is its commitment to the long-term management of liver disease. “Our motto is ‘Your team for life,’” says Florman. “We're not here just to do the transplant, but to care for the patient for their entire life. We focus on the broader picture — that sets us apart.”