



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
August 30, 2017

Contact: Mike Burke, Sacred Heart Health System  
(850) 416-1153

## **Medicare Approval Opens Door for More Kidney Transplants in Pensacola**

PENSACOLA, Fla. (Aug. 30, 2017) -- The kidney transplant program at Sacred Heart Hospital in Pensacola, a collaboration with University of Florida Health, has received Medicare approval that will allow more area resident to have access to needed transplants. Medicare certification of the program became effective June 28

“This expands the pool of patients who can potentially undergo transplants at Sacred Heart. It will also help decrease wait time for those who are already waiting for a new kidney,” said Dr. Rick Brian Stevens, a professor in the division of transplantation surgery at the UF College of Medicine who practices at Sacred Heart Hospital. “Getting Medicare approval is a pivotal event in developing a high-quality kidney transplant program to fully meet the needs of the community.”

Stevens said the vast majority of patients in Northwest Florida who are receiving dialysis treatment for kidney disease are age 65 or older, and eligible for Medicare.

“There is a very big unmet need for kidney transplants in this region,” he said. “Patients in this part of Florida have a lot of diabetes, hypertension and obesity. End-stage renal disease is also prevalent among the Panhandle population.”

Stevens said the Pensacola-based program currently has a long list of people referred for possible transplants, including 75 who have been on dialysis for more than five years.

Sacred Heart is part of Ascension, the nation’s largest Catholic, non-profit health system.

Throughout the southeastern United States, the average time on a wait list for patients needing a kidney transplant is 73 months, according to the Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients. Previously, Northwest Florida residents had to travel to Gainesville, Birmingham or New Orleans for transplants. Most people cannot afford to be away from home in order have transplant surgery, which also requires multiple tests and medical care before and after the surgery.

“More patients who live in the Pensacola area, hours away from other transplant centers, will clearly benefit from Medicare approval for kidney transplant services at Sacred Heart,” said Dr. Kenneth Andreoni, an associate professor and chief in the division of transplantation surgery at the UF College of Medicine. “Traveling long distances can be quite difficult for people who are very ill, and the coordination of care can be daunting.”

In October 2016, UF Health and Sacred Heart began a collaborative kidney transplant program. The first procedure was performed on Feb. 2. The new program had to perform three transplants before seeking Medicare approval.

Stevens said he anticipates Medicare approval will open the door to steady growth of the program in Pensacola. He estimated that within three years, the Sacred Heart-UF team could be performing 50-80 transplants per year. Future steps include starting living donor transplants, where a healthy person donates a kidney to someone awaiting transplant, such as a family member or friend. Stevens added that one of his top priorities is to expand the program to treat children who need transplants.

The most common causes of kidney failure in the United States are diabetes and high blood pressure. Nationwide, more than 100,000 people are on the waiting list for a lifesaving kidney transplant, and 13 people die each day while waiting for a kidney transplant, according to the National Kidney Foundation.

For more information about Sacred Heart's kidney program, please visit [www.sacred-heart.org/kidney-transplant](http://www.sacred-heart.org/kidney-transplant).

### **About Sacred Heart Health System**

On the Gulf Coast, Sacred Heart Health System based in Pensacola, Fla., and Providence Hospital based in Mobile, Ala., are part of Ascension. Together, these Ascension healthcare facilities have served Gulf Coast communities for more than 160 years and they employ more than 6,600 associates. Across the region, Ascension provided more than \$113 million in community benefit and care of persons living in poverty in fiscal year 2016. Ascension is a faith-based healthcare organization committed to delivering compassionate, personalized care to all, with special attention to persons living in poverty and those most vulnerable. Ascension is the largest non-profit health system in the U.S. and the world's largest Catholic health system, operating 2,500 sites of care — including 141 hospitals and more than 30 senior living facilities — in 24 states and the District of Columbia. For more on Sacred Heart Health System, visit [www.sacred-heart.org](http://www.sacred-heart.org).

### **About UF Health**

UF Health, the most comprehensive academic health center in the Southeast, is a collaboration of the University of Florida and UF Health Shands. The colleges of Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Public Health and Health Professions, and Veterinary Medicine, various research centers and institutes, a network of faculty practices and the UF Health Shands family of hospitals fall under the UF Health umbrella, which extends to a regional campus in Jacksonville. UF Health also has a statewide presence through satellite medical, dental and nursing clinics staffed by UF health professionals and through affiliations with community-based health care facilities stretching from Hialeah and Miami to the Florida Panhandle. For more information, visit [UFHealth.org](http://UFHealth.org)

###

