



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**March 15, 2017**

**Contact: Will Condon**  
**(850) 416-1156**

## **First patient receives kidney through Sacred Heart Health System and UF Health collaboration**

**PENSACOLA, Fla.** — A University of Florida Health transplant surgeon has performed Northwest Florida’s first kidney transplant as part of a collaboration between the Gainesville-based health system and Sacred Heart Health System in Pensacola.

On Feb. 2, Renwick Avant, 47, of Pensacola, received a new kidney at the hands of UF Health’s Rick Stevens, M.D., Ph.D., FACS, FAST and Sacred Heart vascular surgeon Christopher LeCroy, M.D. The successful launch of the Sacred Heart and UF Health program was celebrated Wednesday in a ceremony attended by Mr. Avant as well as leaders and specialists from UF and Sacred Heart.

“Partnering with Sacred Heart Health System is an opportunity to provide live-saving and life-extending care to end-stage kidney disease patients through kidney transplantation. Patients who live in the Pensacola area, hours away from other transplant centers, will clearly benefit from kidney transplant services at Sacred Heart,” said Kenneth Andreoni, M.D., 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.”

Diagnosed with end-stage renal disease in 2009 and on various transplant lists since 2011, Avant has had outpatient dialysis at least twice a week, four to five hours each session. Hoping to decrease his wait time to receive a new kidney, Avant transferred to Sacred Heart in November 2016.

Sacred Heart is a member of Ascension, the country’s largest nonprofit health system.

“The transplant procedure went very smoothly,” said Stevens, who is also a professor in the UF College of Medicine’s division of transplantation surgery. “We had practiced every aspect of patient flow many times. For our first case, we could not have had a better patient than Mr. Avant. You don’t

realize how many people are involved in the process; it touches almost every aspect of the hospital. Performing the surgery and seeing the incredible care the entire team provided was very rewarding.”

In October 2016, UF Health and Sacred Heart Health System launched a collaborative kidney transplant program to benefit thousands of people across the Southeast currently awaiting a lifesaving transplant. The program is led by Stevens and Sacred Heart transplant nephrologist Douglas Scott Keith, M.D., FAST.

“The collaboration between UF and Sacred Heart brings together the best of university-based and community-based medicine to provide excellent, state-of-the-art patient care,” said Michael L. Good, M.D., dean of the UF College of Medicine. “This will benefit the citizens of our state, especially those who live in the western Panhandle.”

Added Susan Davis, president and CEO of Sacred Heart Health System, “This is truly an extension of our mission to provide lifesaving care to those who desperately need it, like Mr. Avant. We are honored to collaborate with UF Health to provide the only kidney transplant program in Northwest Florida, which will increase access to care for patients with end-stage renal disease.”

Avant said he looks forward to spending time with his wife, Jennifer, and their two children and returning to work. He hopes to pick up a favorite hobby soon as well.

“I coached Little League Baseball for 18 years but I had to stop when I went on dialysis,” Avant said. “I’d like to start to coach again, now that I’m feeling better and I have the time.”

Avant said that he required dialysis three days a week, with each treatment taking about five hours. “It was like a part-time job,” he said.

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 to undergo kidney transplants, including the required pre-surgery and follow-up care.

“Our collaboration with Sacred Heart in kidney transplant, as well as in other areas, makes a difference in addressing crucial health care needs that have until now been unavailable to patients in this area,” said Ed Jimenez, CEO of UF Health Shands.

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 <http://www.sacred-heart.org/kidney-transplant/>.

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

On the Gulf Coast, Sacred Heart Health System based in Pensacola, Florida, and Providence based in Mobile, Alabama, 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)

###

