



A lifetime of specialist care

PRESS RELEASE

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Harrow dad given life-saving transplant pays tribute to donor's family

Last year, Wilson Da Graça, 35, was so ill, he could not pick up his baby son or play with his daughter. He needed oxygen through a tube to simply exist.

After receiving a new pair of lungs during a touch-and-go 12-hour operation at Harefield Hospital, the former Nando's worker can now run for a bus and take care of his young family.

As this year's Organ Donation Week begins, Wilson is speaking out about the gratitude he feels to the staff at Harefield Hospital – and his donor and their family.

The Harrow resident has suffered with the lung condition cystic bronchiectasis since he was a child – although he wasn't diagnosed until 2005.

The symptoms of cystic bronchiectasis are similar to cystic fibrosis, although doctors aren't sure what causes the condition. Lung infections cause damage to the bronchi (the main passage ways to the lungs); they become too wide, making the lungs build up mucus and infection.

"I have the most severe form – which is progressive and can be fatal.

"In a way, it was a relief to find out what it was. I made the decision to remain positive. You have to live your normal life. For years I got by, sometimes I'd be in and out of hospital with infections. Other times I'd seem healthy, and I prayed the bronchiectasis had gone away."

Unfortunately, by 2013, it was clear Wilson was seriously ill. Despite this, he worked shifts at Nando's until he became too poorly.

He says: "I was using oxygen at night to help me function. I'd start at 8pm and stop at 8am. I still worked, but on a part-time basis.

"By 2016, the doctor told me I needed to be hooked up to the oxygen all the time. It wasn't ideal. My wife Iglesia and I were expecting our second baby – we already had our daughter, Tatiana, now aged 9."

"I had so much to live for."

Early last year, Wilson was listed for transplant.

“My little boy Thomas was born on 13th June 2017. Ten days later, my doctor, Dr Carby, admitted me to Harefield Hospital.”

Wilson admits the months he spent waiting to see if there would be a suitable donor left him feeling very low.

He recalls: “There were a lot of questions in my head. Would the lungs ever come? Would I survive the operation? Would I ever get to be a dad to my baby boy? I admit I used to be in tears.

“It was so tough for Iglesia too. She was there with our daughter and this tiny baby of a few weeks – and thinking she was going to lose me.”

In fact, Wilson’s health started to deteriorate dramatically. His doctors and nurses weren’t sure he would be able to live long enough to receive a transplant.

Wilson was placed on an ECMO machine – a mechanism which pumps and oxygenates a patient’s blood outside the body, allowing the heart and lungs to rest.

“I had been in an induced coma, but in August I was woken up. A pair of lungs was available.”

Although the operation had its complications – at one point the surgical team believed they had lost him – but thankfully Wilson rallied.

After spending a few days in ICU, Wilson eventually opened his eyes.

He says: “I saw every single one of the nurses who had been involved in my care had come in my room to see me waking. I felt like a celebrity!”

Despite undergoing such a serious and complex operation, Wilson was out of hospital in just two weeks.

He recalls: “When the staff saw me walking about, they didn’t believe it was me. One person joked, ‘Are you Wilson’s twin brother?’ I looked so well after having been so close to death.”

A year on since the transplant Wilson can run and play with his daughter – no longer reliant on being tubed up to an oxygen supply.

Wilson never forgets the donor or their family.

“Every day I think of the people who lost a loved one and who were generous enough in their grief to think about someone in desperate need, like me.

“I just want to say thank you. This person’s lungs are helping me be a father to my children.”

Find out more about Organ Donation Week 2018 - Monday 3rd to Sunday 9th September here:

<https://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/news-and-campaigns/news/save-the-date-organ-donation-week-2018/>

Ends

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Notes to editors:

Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Foundation Trust is the UK's largest specialist centre for the treatment of heart and lung disease. Working from two sites, Royal Brompton Hospital in Chelsea, West London, and Harefield Hospital, near Uxbridge, the Trust has an international reputation for the expertise of its staff, high standard of care and research success. Experts at the Trust help patients from all age groups who have heart and lung problems and provide some of the most complex surgery and sophisticated treatments available anywhere in the world.

The Trust is the UK's largest centre for the treatment of adult congenital heart disease and is the country's leading provider of specialist respiratory care. Over the years the Trust has been responsible for major medical breakthroughs, such as the UK's first combined heart and lung transplant. It established the UK's first adult service for cystic fibrosis, which is now one of Europe's biggest treatment centres for the condition, and has pioneered the use of primary angioplasty for the treatment of heart attacks. Today the Heart Attack Centre at Harefield has one of the fastest arrival-to-treatment times in the UK, a crucial factor in patients' survival.

As a member of the Academic Health Science Centre (AHSC), in collaboration with Imperial College London, Imperial College Healthcare Trust and The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust, the Trust helps to drive innovation and improved care for over 1.1 million patients each year in North West London, by aligning the research, education and clinical services of the partner organisations. For further information, visit www.rbht.nhs.uk