

## State funds to go toward center for transplants

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By Derrick DePledge



The state will provide seed money to help the Queen's Medical Center quickly launch an organ transplant facility to replace the one closed in the Hawaii Medical Center's bankruptcy.

Queen's hopes to have a new transplant facility ready within a few months so patients do not have to fly to the mainland for kidney and liver replacements. The Transplant Institute of the Pacific closed when HMC's Liliha hospital went out of business, leaving the Pacific with no organ transplant hub. More than 400 Hawaii patients are awaiting transplants, mostly for kidneys.

State House and Senate negotiators agreed Monday on a bill that would provide \$1.5 million in state money that would be matched by Queen's to help cover the estimated \$3 million in startup costs for the transplant facility. The bill would also direct \$300,000 to the National Kidney Foundation of Hawaii, which would be matched by private donors to offer renal services to patients.

Gov. Neil Abercrombie said in his State of the State address Monday that he would back an emergency appropriation for the \$1.8 million.

House and Senate leaders had promised to fast-track the transplant center bill, one of several that stalled at the end of last session due to an unrelated dispute over tax policy. The bill could clear the Legislature and reach the governor's desk within the next several days.

"If this transplant program were not here, that would be such a hardship for the community," said Paula Yoshioka, senior vice president of corporate development at Queen's.

Queen's needs certification from the United Network for Organ Sharing, a private nonprofit that manages transplants for the federal government, before performing transplants. The one-time state money will be used by Queen's to help hire staff and set up the new facility. Queen's has estimated the facility could cause \$7 million to \$8 million in losses in the first five years.

Glen Hayashida, chief executive officer of the National Kidney Foundation of Hawaii, thanked lawmakers and the

governor for moving quickly.

"We're very optimistic that the transplant center will be fast-tracked as well," he said.

Jason Ueki, vice president of marketing at a shrimp breeding company who lives in Hilo, was an insulin-dependent diabetic who had chronic kidney disease. He said he struggled with several medical complications before his transplant, a frustrating experience that would have been more difficult if he had to travel to the mainland for care.

"The only thing that kept me going was I had the will and I had hope that I would get the call for the transplant," said Ueki, who had the surgery at HMC in Liliha. "Without a transplant center here, you're taking hope away from a lot of people."

State Sen. Josh Green (D, Milolii-Waimea), an emergency room doctor and chairman of the Senate Health Committee, said lawmakers made the transplant center bill a priority for the session because of the potential health ramifications for patients who are waiting for transplants. He said lawmakers will also discuss options later this session for patients who need bone marrow transplants, which would not be provided at the new facility.

"There can't be a delay. Another six-month delay would have been another large number of individuals in our society not getting care," he said.

"This is a one-time funding support," said Rep. Ryan Yamane (D, Waipahu-Mililani), chairman of the House Health Committee. "We do know it's going to be a burden onto Queen's. However, we are very thankful that they are taking up this responsibility on behalf of the community."

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