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Lisa Kessler/CNS

Sister of Providence Agnes Clare Buckley illustrates a catechism lesson for students at St. Rose School in Chelsea, Mass.

Transplant patients never forget donors

Catholic News Service
By Henry Leen Jr.

BOSTON — In 1989, Stacey Avallone of Lexington was described as the youngest known liver transplant case in U.S. medical history.

She was diagnosed soon after birth with a rare liver ailment that left her liver scarred and useless. Less than a month after she was born, Stacey received a liver transplant in an 18-hour operation.

Because the donor organ was 10 times larger than a size appropriate for a newborn, it had to be reduced in the operating room. Two weeks later, a second operation was required when Stacey began hemorrhaging.

"We were lucky to get a liver donation," Stacey's mother told *The Pilot*, Boston's archdiocesan newspaper. "If Stacey hadn't gotten a liver, she wouldn't be here today. It's really unbelievable. If you saw her today, you'd say there's nothing wrong with her."

Providence Sister Agnes Clare Buckley, too, knows the struggle of dealing with an organ transplant. When she checked into the hospital in 1986 with pneumonia and congestive heart failure, doctors told her that only a heart transplant could save her.

In 1989, after much soul-searching, the teacher at St. Rose Grammar School in Chelsea received a heart transplant.

In the United States today, some 3,000 patients die each year waiting for an organ transplant. Thousands more die who never qualified for a place on the waiting list.

The urgent need has prompted the nation's largest medical organizations to form a Coalition on Donation.

"We believe every adult should become an organ and tissue donor," said Dr. Lonnie R. Bristow, president of the American Medical Association, a coalition member.

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing, in 1995,

more than 19,000 transplants were performed in the United States.

Just like the Avallone family and countless other patients, Sister Buckley has never forgotten the donor she never knew who gave her the gift of life.

"I pray for her and her family every day," she said.

For 12 months after being told that only a heart transplant could save her, Sister Buckley had agonized about what to do.

"I was frightened and I said, 'No way. That's extraordinary means, and I don't have to take it,'" she said. "I pictured myself on a machine the rest of my life. I knew nothing about transplants."

She questioned if a transplant was the right moral decision. And after talking to several priests and sisters she became "reconciled to the idea, as much as you can be."

Time was running out for her, and she won the race by the barest of margins. In September 1989, she received the heart of a 40-year-old woman.

Within a year after the 10-hour operation, Sister Buckley was back with her 45 fifth-graders at St. Rose.

"I don't think I could have gotten through it without my faith and without the support of my religious sisters," she said.

Always mindful that the "statistics are very high for those who don't make it," Sister Buckley said, "the whole thing is just mind-boggling. It's a miracle."

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Award honors St. Mary's

Top, nationwide health-care honors are going to St. Mary's Hospital of Rochester, awarded the 1996 Foster G. McGaw Prize for Excellence in Community Service.

Presented annually by the Baxter Foundation, philanthropic arm of Baxter International Inc., and the American Hospital Association, the award is in its 11th year. It recognizes commitment to community service through innovative programs that expand access to health care, according to a press release from the Baxter Foundation and the AHA.

The award, which carries a prize of \$75,000, will be presented Aug. 5 at the AHA's 1996 convention in Philadelphia.

"Helping people get the health care that they need often is about more than dollars and cents," Baxter Foundation President Arthur Staubitz stated. "St. Mary's Hospital goes beyond cost issues to determine what other factors are keeping people out of the health-care system, and implements strategies to help people overcome those obstacles."

AHA President Dick Davidson added, "St. Mary's is a prime example of a hospital that becomes a partner with the community and, in doing so, finds effective solutions to the many challenges that exist."

Among the reasons cited for recognizing St. Mary's:

- Rochester's first hospital, St. Mary's chose to stay in its community despite a significant decline in the neighborhood's economic and social base. The nonprofit, 218-bed hospital is at 89 Genesee St. in the city's southwest section.

- "As a community mainstay, St. Mary's has taken a leadership role in diagnosing and treating many of Rochester's health needs. When a 1986 study found that the ratio of full-time primary care physicians to population was 1:4,500 in high poverty areas, the hospital established a Primary Care Development Task Force," the release noted. That led to a primary-care network, which today includes 24 practices dispersed in underserved neighborhoods.

- In 1991, the hospital developed HealthReach, a program designed to help people gain accessible primary care and to be educated about preventive health care. The hospital had noted numerous non-financial obstacles to receiving health care, including child care needs, language and cultural differences, lack of trust, poor awareness of programs, and complicated application procedures.

Among HealthReach programs are Healthy Moms, Healthcare for Homeless People, the Psychiatry Satellite Services Program and Cameron Community Health Center.

"Being chosen for the McGaw prize is a great honor for everybody at St. Mary's and all of our partners in the community," Stewart Putnam, St. Mary's president, stated in the press release. "I am particularly pleased for the Daughters of Charity, the Sisters who have sponsored St. Mary's since its founding in 1857."

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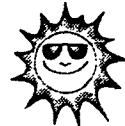
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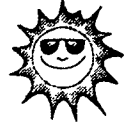
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