

For some in need, Facebook is route to new kidney

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In this Dec. 27, 2011 photo, Damon Brown sits with his son Julian, 5, at their home in Seattle. Damon Brown found a kidney on Facebook after telling his story on a special page the Seattle dad created under the name, “Damon Kidney.” His friends and family forwarded the link to everyone they knew and on Jan. 3, a woman his wife has known for years but not someone they consider a close family friend, will be giving him a kidney. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

(AP) -- Here's another reason for holdouts to join the social media site Facebook: It's a great place to find a kidney.

Between the kid photos and reminiscences about high school, more and more pleas for help from people with failing kidneys are popping up. [Facebook](#) and other [social media](#) sites are quickly becoming a go-to place to find a generous person with a kidney to spare, according to the

people asking for help and some national organizations that facilitate matches.

Damon Brown found a kidney on Facebook after telling his story on a special page the Seattle dad created under the name, "Damon Kidney." His friends and family forwarded the link to everyone they knew and on Jan. 3 a woman his wife has known for years, but not someone they consider a close family friend, will be giving him a kidney.

"She said it wasn't really for me. It was for my kids, because they deserve to have a dad around," said Brown, 38.

Brown's story is not unique, said April Paschke, a spokeswoman for the United Network for Organ Sharing, a private nonprofit organization that manages the nation's organ transplant system for the federal government.

"We see more and more people matched up by social media," she said. "It's an extension of the way we communicate. Before we found the Internet, people found other ways: through a church bulletin, word of mouth or an advertisement even."

This past year, a man in Michigan also found a [kidney donor](#) through Facebook, and a Florida woman found one through Craigslist.

Damon Brown admits he was a little embarrassed to ask for help so publicly. Except for telling [close friends](#) and family, the Seattle father of two young boys had been keeping his illness pretty quiet.

He was on the official transplant list and had started mobile dialysis through Northwest Kidney Centers but Brown was seeing his health deteriorate - he was constantly tired and achy. He couldn't sit on the bed to tell bedtime stories to 5-year-old Julian and 3-year-old Theo because he had to stay close to his dialysis machine.

"I'm a strong guy, but I would have to say, it's been rough this year," he said. Brown had put himself on the long wait list for a kidney from a deceased donor, knowing he would have to wait at least three years before he was called.

After one particularly difficult visit with his doctor, Damon and his wife, Bethany, decided to create the Facebook page, which has attracted more than 1,400 friends.

A few weeks ago, after the transplant was approved and scheduled, Brown posted the good news to his Facebook friends. More than 300 people responded: "Whoo hoo....what a great Christmas present," wrote Kelly L. Hallissey. "This is awesome!! Praying for you and your family for positive news and a great way to begin 2012!" wrote Brenda Tomtan.

Many people are not aware that kidney and liver donations can now come from living donors.

In 2010, 16,800 kidney transplants were performed in the United States, of which 6,277 came from living donors, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing. An average of 46 kidney transplants take place each day in this country, while another 13 people who have been waiting for a kidney die each day. About 90,000 are on the transplant list right now.

Jacqueline Ryall, 45, said she felt a need to donate a kidney to Brown to give back her own good health and all she has been given. She's not a mom and gushed about how beautiful Damon and Bethany's kids are.

"The real reason I'm doing this is he's got kids and he's a good guy," she said. "My life is in a good place. I've been given lots and I have a responsibility to give back."

Ryall said her elderly mother does not understand why she would give a kidney to someone other than her own brother and sister, and her family is worried about her health going forward.

After her own research, however, Ryall decided it's relatively safe for a woman in good health to donate a kidney. If something is going to go wrong with her own kidneys, she has heard they usually fail in twos.

"Right now it feels like absolutely the right thing to do," she said, adding that she hopes her decision will help make other people less afraid to do the same thing.

News media coverage of his quest flooded his hospital with so many requests for information - from total strangers - that Brown said he was asked to pull back on his publicity efforts. Four people passed the initial screening and came in for tests. Now that he sees a happy ending coming for himself, Brown would like to do whatever he can to help others.

April Capone, the previous mayor of East Haven, Conn., knows what Brown means about the attraction of happy endings.

Two years ago, she was sitting in her office checking her Facebook feed, when a post from one of her constituents popped up saying he needed a kidney.

"At that moment, Carlos was at Mayo, testing to get on the [transplant list](#)," said Capone, 36. "He really didn't tell anyone he was sick. The doctor said, 'if you don't do it, no one is going to know'." So Carlos Sanchez pulled out his cell phone and posted the request and Capone responded immediately.

"I knew from the second I saw his post that I was going to be a donor," said Capone, who barely knew Sanchez at the time. Now they're as close

as siblings, talk on the phone almost daily and meet for lunch regularly.

Capone said she had no personal reason for donating a [kidney](#); she just want to save a life.

"It was the best thing I ever did with my life," she said. "I wish I had more; I would do it again."

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