

Gareth's looking forward to Christmas this year

A young father from Fife is planning for the best Christmas after being given a second chance with a liver transplant.

Gareth Weeks, 38, was very ill with an incurable liver condition and knew that his only hope was a liver transplant.

It is now six months since his lifesaving surgery and Gareth's life has been turned around completely. He is now able to look forward to a family Christmas with his wife Vicki and seven-year-old daughter Zara now that his health is much better. Previously his skin had turned a deep shade of yellow as a result of his condition.



Gareth, from Dunfermline, Fife, said: "I'm really excited about spending Christmas with my family as we've not really been able to enjoy it fully with my illness hanging over us. This year we'll be enjoying a Christmas lunch at home before heading off to Paris with my brother, sister-in-law and nephews, who arrive from Cape Town on Boxing Day.

“I have a long road ahead, but I’m actually excited about my future again. I’ve entered the Edinburgh half marathon next May and we’ve also booked our first family holiday abroad in years – to Disneyland! “

Gareth is one of hundreds of patients whose lives have been transformed by the teams at the Scottish Liver Transplant Unit at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year.

A total of 1,758 patients have received a lifesaving transplant since the unit first opened its doors on 2 November 1992 to help give patients a second chance of life.



Gareth after surgery

Gareth was diagnosed with an incurable chronic liver disease called Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis (PSC) six years ago.

He said: "I had begun to feel exhausted all the time, but my daughter was only a few months old at the time, so I assumed it was simply part of being a new dad.

"A few months later, I was diagnosed with PSC. I began reading up about my condition before I had even left the hospital car park. I read that there was no cure, a transplant was required, and my life expectancy would be between 10 and 12 years. It was a total shock."

Following several turbulent years of drug trials and being monitored closely by clinicians, Gareth was told that he would be added to the transplant list.

His liver function had begun to deteriorate so severely that his skin had become even more yellow from severe jaundice.

After seven months of anxiously waiting for a call with a hospital bag waiting at the door, Gareth received "the call" in May this year to tell him that a match had been found.

Gareth added: "In six months, I've gone from sleeping everyday to exercising. I've gone from missing out to being there. I've gone from feeling hopeless to hopeful.

"All of this would not have been possible without the generosity of my donor and their family. I don't yet have the words to fully describe how I feel other than my donor is a true hero.

"I am so grateful to all of the team at the RIE for giving me and my family this second chance, they are truly world-class."



John Casey, Consultant Surgeon and Clinical Director for Transplant, NHS Lothian, said: "Gareth's story is incredibly inspiring, and I commend him for raising awareness of organ donation. We wish him and his family all the very best."

“While the sheer number of transplants is remarkable, the transplant unit is about people helping people and I am very proud of all the staff who have worked so hard in the Scottish Liver Transplant Unit over the last 30 years. If you participate in any part of transplantation, you know that each transplant takes a full team including doctors, nurses, allied professionals, donor services and family members working together.

“The Transplant Unit has been able to help so many patients because of the generosity of organ donors – those giving the ultimate gift of life. Thank you all for being part of the Scottish Liver Transplant Unit’s evolution and success.”

The transplant team has been working throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and carried out 182 liver transplants during that period, overcoming any difficulties to ensure the high level of safety and patient care was maintained.

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