Today, kidney transplant has become the preferred treatment for end-stage kidney disease (ESKD). It provides a survival advantage and far greater quality of life compared to patients on dialysis. Hispanic Americans or Latinos in the United States have a higher rate of ESKD compared to Non-Hispanic Whites. However, despite this, the rate of kidney transplantation in Hispanic Americans remains lower than in non-Hispanic Whites. Although living donor kidney transplantation is considered the best treatment option for ESKD because it confers longer patient and graft survival rates and a better quality of life than deceased donor kidney transplantation, Hispanic Americans proportionally receive less living donor kidney transplants than non-Hispanic Whites. Although there are many factors that influence the lower rate of living organ donation in Hispanic Americans, a large number of them are related to cultural barriers and a lack of knowledge about transplantation. These issues can be overcome when dealt with in a culturally sensitive manner, especially considering that most Hispanic Americans are family oriented and most of the time willing to help their sick family members when they understand what is happening.

While completing his Transplant Surgery Fellowship at Northwestern University’s McGaw Medical Center, Dr. Juan Carlos Caicedo, a native of Colombia, recognized the growing need for a culturally sensitive program to reach out to the Hispanic American population in Chicago. Following completion of his fellowship, Dr Caicedo elected to stay in Chicago and join the faculty at Northwestern University. In December 2006, he began to establish the Hispanic Transplant Program in an effort to provide better care to this underserved population. This Program, the first of its kind in the United States, focused first on kidney transplantation and, since 2010, has included liver transplantation as well. From the time a patient selects the Spanish-speaking line on the Transplant Center’s main number, everyone the patient talks to is Spanish speaking – physicians, surgeons, social worker, nurses, and ancillary health staff – there are more than 20 faculty and staff in the program that are fluent in the Spanish language. Perhaps of equal importance, each person the patient speaks with is well acquainted with the Spanish culture (most of them are Hispanics) and is in tune with the patient’s concerns and able to address them in a culturally sensitive manner. After implementation of the Hispanic Transplant program, not only has the number of living donor kidney transplants increased, but also the number of deceased donor kidney transplants. The same pattern has also been seen in liver transplantation. Both the number of Hispanic people added to the waiting list for a transplant and the number of Hispanic people receiving an organ transplant have increased significantly since the institution of this pioneering program. We remain hopeful that this trend will continue, especially as Hispanic Americans are currently the fastest growing population in the US.

Our mission is to reach the pinnacle of academic excellence such that the Comprehensive Transplant Center at Northwestern University is considered synonymous with best clinical practice, high impact research, and the most desirable training program in transplantation.

For more information on the Hispanic Transplant Program, please contact the Comprehensive Transplant Center at ctc@northwestern.edu.