

Liver recipient had to battle snowstorm to reach operating table in the nick of time

Quick transport for transplant

BY SAMUEL GOLDSMITH
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FOUR POLICE departments, two helicopters, one plane and dozens of plows teamed to get a Long Island woman to her liver transplant surgery — just in the nick of time.

Cancer patient Maryann (Mack) Steinbock's doctor called late Thursday night to tell his patient her year of waiting was over. A liver was finally available — but there were daunting logistical problems before the operation could occur.

The liver was in Buffalo, the patient was in Nassau County, the doctors were in the Bronx, and more than 20 inches of snow was piling up outside.

"We were very concerned," said Dr. Milan Kinkhabwala, head of the liver transplant program at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx. "We only had a 12-hour window to operate and it was going to be very close."

The organ was harvested Friday at 4 a.m., meaning doctors had just about seven hours to get everything ready and still have enough time to complete the five-hour surgery.

"When I got the call, I couldn't believe it," said Steinbock, 59. "I live all the way out in Atlantic Beach, and I had to get to the hospital, and there was all this snow."

Hospital officials in the Bronx got on the phone with the NYPD, who coordinated with Nassau cops and the highway patrol to give Steinbock and her husband a seamless trip across three counties to Montefiore.

"It was like being in a movie," Steinbock said. "All of a sudden, the police come, and there were these cute motorcycle guys. Everybody stopped traffic and there was even a helicopter."

"The drive normally takes an hour," said her husband, Corey Steinbock, 67. "This time it took 35 minutes."

The liver was flown in by plane and helicopter, after getting an escort from state troopers, and arrived at the hospital just before Steinbock did.

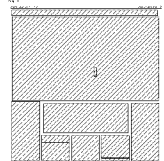
"Once we had everything in place, the surgery went very well," Kinkhabwala said. "She's doing very well and should be going home later this week."

Corey Steinbock said the quick improvement in his wife's health is remarkable.

"Last week she was pale and all shriveled up. She looked like a ghost," he said. "Now she's like a blossoming flower."

Maryann Steinbock plans to buy tickets for all of her rescuers to accompany her to the Mets' Opening Day at Citi Field. After that, she'll invite the officers to a Passover seder.

"And this summer I want to ride the cute officer's motorcycle." sgoldsmith@nydailynews.com



She takes fall for that, but won't rat on the cops



Surrounded by police, highway patrol and doctors, transplant patient Maryann Steinbock expresses her gratitude yesterday at Montefiore Medical Center. Photo by Enid Alvarez/Daily News