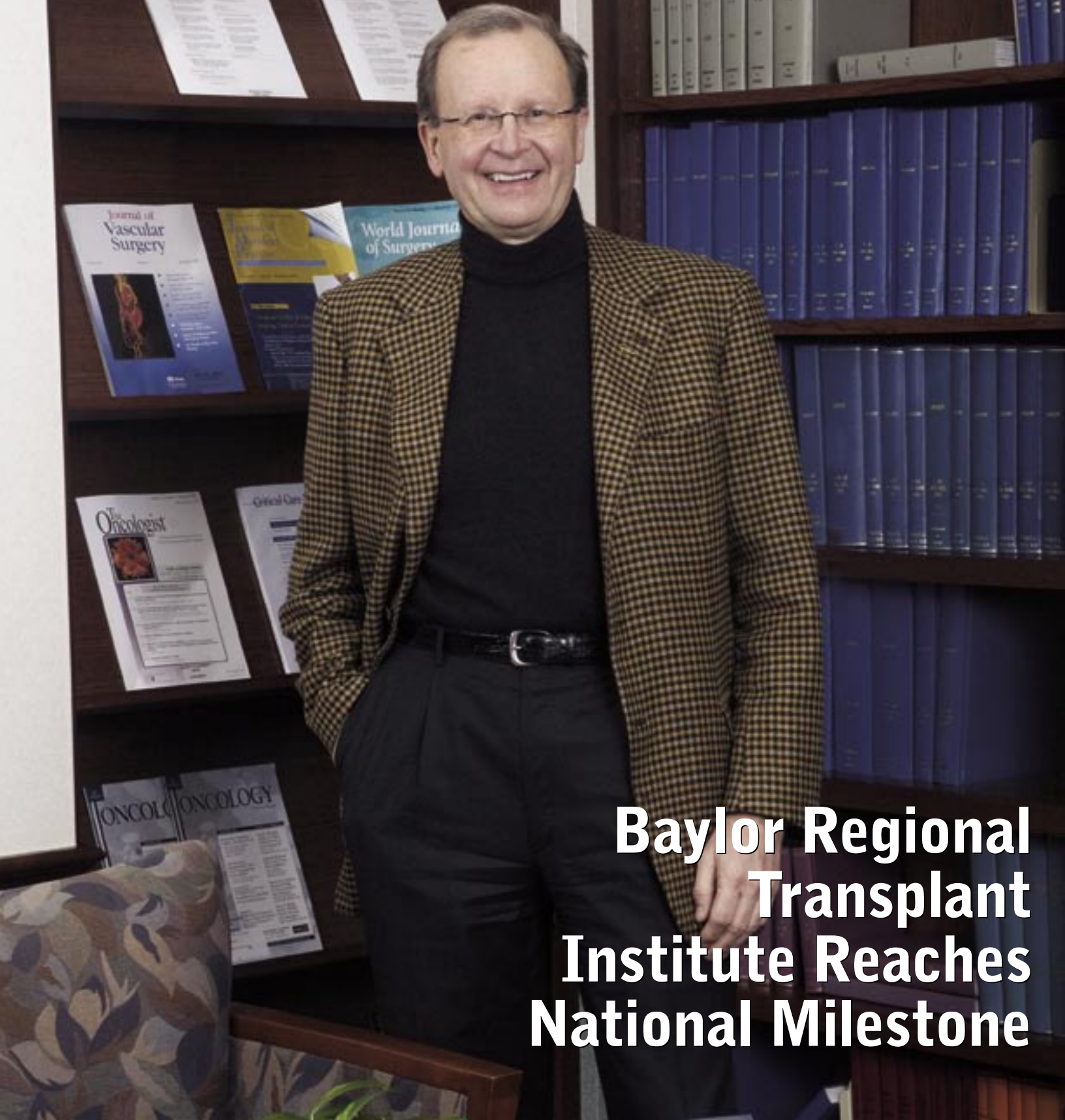


# M.D. NEWS

A BUSINESS AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR PHYSICIANS



**Baylor Regional  
Transplant  
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National Milestone**

# Baylor Regional Transplant Institute Reaches National Milestone

By Paul J. Watkins

In October 2007, officials at Baylor Regional Transplant Institute announced that their programs—located at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas and Baylor All Saints Medical Center at Fort Worth—performed their 3,000th adult liver transplant. This accomplishment makes Baylor only the third such program in the nation to reach this milestone. The surgery was performed at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas on Thursday, October 18, and the patient—a 53-

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year-old from Kemp, TX—was discharged in good condition.

Liver transplantation has advanced dramatically since Baylor Regional Transplant Institute’s surgeons on the medical staff at Baylor Dallas performed their first liver transplant surgery in December 1984. Göran Klintmalm, M.D., Ph.D., FACS, Chairman of the Transplant Institute, recalled that when he was introduced to the field of transplantation in the ’70s, the long-term survival rate for patients was 17%.

Today, the national three-year survival rate reported by UNOS, the United Network for Organ Sharing, is 78%, and Baylor programs currently have an 84% three-year survival rate. “Many of our patients are now approaching 10-, 15-, 20- and even 25-year survival milestones, with an excellent quality of life,” said Dr. Klintmalm.

“Today, liver transplant patients have virtually normal liver function following their recovery,” Dr. Klintmalm reported. “In fact, the science of transplant surgery and anti-rejection medications has progressed such that the majority of liver transplant patients will die from causes unrelated to their transplant—such as by car accidents, heart attacks or strokes—not from problems related to liver function.”

Dr. Klintmalm, who is the current President of the American Society of Transplant Surgeons, said knowledge is gained with every case performed. This makes 3,000 transplants of any organ a significant accomplishment for any one of the nation’s 120 programs.

## TRAINED BY A PIONEER

The world’s first successful human liver transplant was performed by Dr. Thomas Starzl at the University of Pittsburgh in 1967. Since that time, transplant techniques have been refined and enhanced and now, many thousands of lives are saved every year when patients receive a new liver.

**D**r. Klintmalm credited refined surgical and anesthesiology techniques, coupled with decades of experience, for the success of the Baylor liver transplant program. The institute’s programs at Baylor Dallas and Baylor All Saints transplant nearly 200 adult livers each year, and are among the busiest liver transplant programs in the world.



**“In the 1980s, a straightforward liver transplant surgery took 14-15 hours. A more complex one could take 25 hours but on average, it was 20 hours of surgery without a break. It was incessant. Today, at Baylor, from the time of the initial incision to the time to close, it usually takes 4-5 hours.” — Göran Klintmalm, M.D., Ph.D., FACS**

Dr. Klintmalm, a native of Sweden, was fortunate enough to receive liver transplantation training directly from Dr. Starzl starting in 1979 — a time when liver transplantation was being done at only two places in the world. Such unprecedented and challenging work made Dr. Klintmalm wonder if he had the skill necessary to move into the difficult and largely uncharted territory of liver transplantation. “Once I had been with Tom Starzl in Denver and then moved to the University of Pittsburgh, the question was, ‘Am I good enough to do this?’ Essentially, there were only two surgeons in the world doing this — Tom Starzl in Denver and Roy Calne in Cambridge.”

In the mid-80s, Baylor University Medical Center hired Dr. Starzl as a consultant to assist in identifying a transplant surgeon to head up their newly created liver transplant program. When the time came to choose a surgeon, Baylor made an offer to Dr. Klintmalm.

The offer to come to Baylor was a tremendous opportunity and also a tremendous challenge. Said Dr. Klintmalm, “It was an offer to a young man to spread his wings and see if the wings were strong enough to carry him.” Training with Dr. Starzl gave him confidence that he could meet the challenge. “I knew this was something I was good enough to do — as a surgeon, as an administrator, as an investigator,” he said.

The surgeon admitted that had he known then what he knows now, he probably would not have dared to take the offer. “The challenges of creating a comprehensive program are innumerable — to make it work, to develop an infrastructure,” he said, “and at that time, this was in a field with only a handful of players in the country daring to step into the field. There was still an enormous amount of unknowns — how to do it, how to care for the patient, how the anesthesia should be done — all those things. I don’t think there was one single obstacle to overcome; there were many.”

The administrative staff at Baylor was extraordinarily supportive when he arrived in December 1984, said Dr. Klintmalm. “The commitment was complete and unlimited, as was the support and commitment from the medical staff,” he related. “Both administration and staff were

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not only committed to creating a program but to doing it right and to being a world-class program.”

“When Baylor’s transplant program opened, we were the third or fourth program in the nation at that time,” he explained. “Our goal was to remain a leader among the top comprehensive programs, and we set out to define the field of liver transplant surgery. Surgeons on staff at Baylor have written textbooks. We have outcomes above the national norm. We have trained fellows that now practice throughout the world. I think that’s what I ascribe the outstanding results and hallmark 3,000 transplant number to — a commitment to do it as well as can be done anywhere.”

More than 20 years later, Dr. Klintmalm is still amazed at the trust that was put in him to develop Baylor’s liver transplantation program and guide it to success. “Looking back,” he said, “nothing is more humbling than this institute, with its board of trustees and administration and medical staff, looking at this 34-year-old foreigner with a strange accent and being willing to put so many resources, as well as their reputation, behind him. In retrospect, I cannot help but be amazed by the fact that they had the guts to do so.”

## **AT THE FOREFRONT**

As experience in the field of transplantation has increased and surgical techniques have been refined, the time to perform liver transplant surgery has decreased dramatically. “In the 1980s, a straightforward liver transplant surgery took 14-15 hours,” recalled Dr. Klintmalm. “A more complex one could take 25 hours but on average, it was 20 hours of surgery without a break. It was incessant. Today, at Baylor, from the time of the initial incision to the time to close, it usually takes 4-5 hours.”

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The 3,000th liver transplant was performed at Baylor Dallas on Rick Bryon, a 53-year-old male from Kemp, TX. Only two other programs in the nation have reached this milestone. Mr. Bryon marvels at how well he feels following his transplant.

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“It’s amazing how things have changed since the program began,” Dr. Klintmalm said. “The Baylor Regional Transplant Institute is among the most significant transplant centers in the world. Doctors come to our programs to study our techniques. We have trained more than 35 fellows who have gone to join and even lead significant transplant centers in other cities in the U.S. and around the world. The Mayo Clinic in Scottsdale is run by one of our graduates. The University of Chicago program is run by one of our graduates. Another surgeon trained by Baylor also runs the program at Henry Ford. I have great pride in what we have accomplished.”

That pride is shared by all the members of the transplant team, and Dr. Klintmalm said teamwork is one of the major keys to the programs’ success. “You always hear this notion about teamwork,” he said. “Nothing exemplifies the success you can achieve with teamwork more than a transplant team. Liver transplantation is so complex and so multifaceted. To get this done right, it’s almost how you define teamwork. There are no departmental lines. If you’re part of the team, you’re part of the team. It doesn’t matter your title or degree — you’re part of the team and that goes in every direction. That is part of the commitment.”

Teamwork is something that Baylor expects to extend outside the program as well. “Dr. Ron Busuttill, Chief of the UCLA program, and I have co-edited the prevailing textbook in liver transplantation that is used worldwide. Hundreds of other professional papers and journal articles have also come out of the Baylor program. The sharing of knowledge and collaboration among top programs has benefited transplant care around the world. I think there are few who would argue that point.”

## Baylor Regional Transplant Institute

In 2007, Baylor transplant centers performed:

- 224 blood and marrow transplants
- 185 adult liver transplants
- 21 pediatric liver transplants
- 257 kidney transplants
- 28 pancreas transplants
- 15 heart transplants
- 14 lung transplants
- 3 islet cell transplants



## THE NEXT 3,000

Looking toward the future, the entire Baylor transplant team aims to identify ways to use existing and emerging tools to treat patients so that they experience a more rapid recovery and fewer side effects. As a program, they have been on the forefront of developing new immunosuppressive drugs and the protocols dictating how they are used. However, Dr. Klintmalm sees the need for using immunosuppressive drugs lessening in the future, as advances are made in research, techniques and technologies related to liver transplantation.

“I think we will be able to, if not completely then almost completely, stop using immunosuppressive drugs after some time following transplant,” he predicted. “I think we’ll see that in my professional lifetime. There are many developments coming, and our opportunities to treat and prevent complications improve continuously.”

*Göran Klintmalm, M.D., Ph.D., FACS, is Director of Transplantation Services at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas. As a surgeon, administrator and investigator, Dr. Klintmalm has been instrumental in building and maintaining liver transplant programs that recently marked their 3,000th liver transplant.*

**For more information, please contact Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas (214) 820-2050, Baylor All Saints Medical Center at Fort Worth (817) 922-4650 or on the Internet at [www.BaylorHealth.edu](http://www.BaylorHealth.edu). ■**