

First Patient with Pig Kidney Transplant Dies, Research Continues



Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston announced the passing of Rick Slayman, 62, who earlier this year made medical history as the first human recipient of a genetically modified pig kidney. Despite the pioneering transplant in March, his death saddened both the medical community and his family, who emphasised his inspirational legacy.

Xenotransplantation: Challenges and Innovations

Slayman's medical journey was marked by resilience and hope. Having endured seven years of dialysis, he initially received a human kidney transplant in 2018 at the same hospital. However, after five years, the organ failed, necessitating a return to dialysis. The subsequent transplantation from a genetically modified pig, provided by eGenesis of Cambridge, Massachusetts, represented a groundbreaking advancement in organ availability. The procedure aimed to address the critical shortage of human organs for transplant, a challenge affecting over 100,000 people in the U.S. awaiting such procedures, with kidneys being especially scarce. The pig kidney, genetically edited to remove harmful genes and enhance compatibility, held promise for revolutionising organ transplantation.

Balancing Progress and Risk When Exploring Xenotransplantation

Slayman's case was not the first instance of xenotransplantation – the transfer of organs between species – but it was among the most innovative. Earlier experiments had seen pig kidneys successfully transplanted into monkeys, demonstrating prolonged survival. This success was partly attributed to advancements in immunosuppressive drugs like tegoprotubart, developed by Eledon Pharmaceuticals, which aimed to mitigate rejection by the recipient's immune system. However, despite these efforts, Slayman's passing underscores the complexities and risks inherent in pioneering medical interventions. The medical community continues to grapple with the ethical, scientific, and logistical challenges of xenotransplantation, as evidenced by previous attempts like the University of Maryland's transplantation of a genetically modified pig heart, which resulted in the patient's death two months later.

Yet, Slayman's legacy endures, serving as a testament to human resilience and the pursuit of medical advancement. His family's statement reflects their sorrow and pride in his courage and the hope he embodied. In his memory, medical professionals remain dedicated to pushing the boundaries of science and innovation, striving to improve the lives of countless individuals awaiting life-saving transplants.

Source & Image Credit: [Reuters](#)

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