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Dr. Thomas Starzl: Father of Transplantation and TRIO

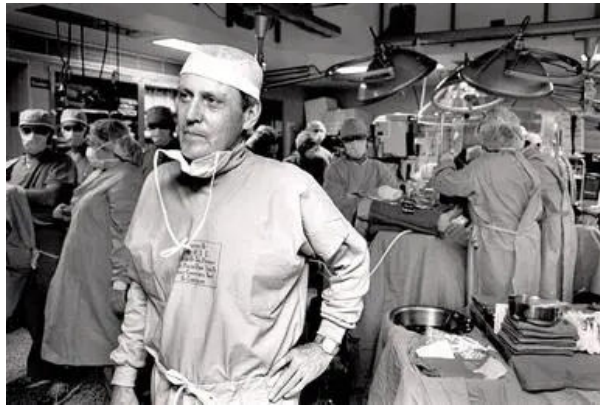
-  Karen Hoyt
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Dr. Thomas Starzl: Father of Transplantation and TRIO – I learned more about this while preparing a presentation for The AASLD Liver Meeting. Lorrinda Gray Davis, who is the founder of Oklahoma's TRIO Chapter, told me this week that Dr. Starzl started the support group for liver transplant recipients and families. In 2020, we started our Oklahoma chapter, with me as her first VEEP, because we saw the need.

During COVID, she went to work opening zooms in weekly meetings, and the rest is history. Now she is president of TRIO International. But I'm getting ahead of myself. This story is about Dr. Starzl and what I imagine to be one of the greatest collision of ideas in medical history. At the end you will find LOT of Resources for Pre and Post Transplant.

I love when history surprises me — not just with facts, but with meaning.

Meet Dr. Thomas Starzl: Father of Transplantation and TRIO



Most people in the liver community know the name **Dr. Thomas Starzl**. He's widely recognized as the **father of transplantation**: the surgeon who performed the world's first human liver transplant in 1963 and the first successful liver transplant in 1967. He didn't stop there. His work gave us the immunosuppressive medications — like azathioprine, cyclosporine, and later tacrolimus — that turned transplantation from a risky experiment into a life-saving, routine clinical procedure.

Dr. Starzl didn't just change medicine. He changed *lives*. Mine included.

But here's what I *didn't* know until this week:

Dr. Thomas Starzl was also the founding president of the Transplant Recipients International Organization (TRIO) — the peer support and advocacy network created by and for people like me: transplant recipients, candidates, families, and caregivers.

This Blew Me Away

Why does this matter?

Because it means the man who made transplant possible didn't stop once the surgery was done. **He went further.** He looked past the big moment in the operating room and asked: *"How are these people going to LIVE afterward?"*

It was 20 years after the first liver transplant, but it was 1 year after a man named Brian Reames had his heart transplant. After all he and his wife had endured, the hours spent in hospital and doctor's office waiting rooms, the hours of tests and procedures, the sleepless nights – he told her of his idea to start a transplant support group. It was his idea that led him to partner with other patients and begin to look for support and funding. He united with other patients and soon found the partnership he needed.

The Junior League of Pittsburgh, together with the University of Pittsburgh helped Brian and the original group of patients to get 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. Dr. Starzl was commissioned the Founding President and the rest is history. To learn more, click the trioweb link below.

Medicine Meets Meaning: The 1980s Collision

Now, regarding my presentation at TLM, here's what makes this even more remarkable: TRIO was born during a powerful turning point in medical history — the 1980s.

That was when **Dr. Bernie Siegel** published his now-classic book *Love, Medicine, and Miracles*, arguing that emotional connection, partnership, and love were not just “nice extras,” but **key ingredients in healing**.

His message was dismissed by many at first — too “unscientific,” too touchy-feely.

But while Siegel was teaching the world to see patients as emotionally complete beings, **Dr. Starzl was living that truth in his own way.**

He didn't just revolutionize liver transplant surgery and immunosuppression.

He saw the emotional aftermath — the loneliness, the fear, the identity crisis — and he **built TRIO** so patients could find **each other**, find **their voice**, and find **ways to survive and thrive together.**

To me, that's the heart of his legacy:

He saved our lives, and then he made room for us to *live* them.

Why It Matters Today

I've been blessed to serve in TRIO-Oklahoma and on the national board. But even more than that, I've benefitted from what Dr. Starzl put into motion: a **network of peers** who show you you're not alone, and that life after transplant is not just possible — it can be *meaningful*. It's been 10 years since my transplant and I never met with a support group while listed. Learning that Dr. Thomas Starzl: Father of Transplantation founded TRIO makes my heart sing.

As I prepare to speak at the AASLD Liver Meeting next week, I'll carry this truth with me:

The same hands that held the scalpel understood that we needed to hold on to each other.

That's why I keep saying:



"The transplant center gives us a new physical chance to live. Peer support teaches us how that is lived out, day by day."

Thank you, Dr. Starzl — not just for our lives, but for reminding us what we truly need to keep on living them.

Dr. Thomas Starzl: Father of Transplantation and TRIO Resources Post Transplant

- **AASLD (American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases)**
 - **Focus:** Guidelines and Education (e.g., Long-Term Management of Liver Transplant, Hepatic Encephalopathy).
 - **Website:** aasld.org/patient-resources
 - **Right Here Right Now**
- **AST (American Society of Transplantation)**
 - **Focus:** Patient Education (Education packets on medication management and living with a transplant).
 - **Website:** healthytransplant.com/patient-information/patient-education-packets
- **American Liver Foundation (ALF)**
 - **Focus:** Public Education and Advocacy (General liver health information and resources).
 - **Contact:** Call 1-800-GO-LIVER Website: [American Liver Foundation](https://www.alffoundation.org)
- **American Transplant Foundation (ATF)**
 - **Focus:** Financial Lifeline and Mentorship (Offers direct **emergency financial grants** to recipients and living donors for essential living expenses).
 - **Website:** americantransplantfoundation.org
- **Global Liver Institute (GLI)**
 - **Focus:** Macro-Level Policy and Awareness (Drives policy reform, equity, and large-scale public health campaigns).
 - **Website:** globalliver.org
- **TRIO (Transplant Recipients International Organization)**
 - **Focus: Local Chapters and Advocacy** (Provides a network of chapters for in-person and virtual peer support, and patient advocacy).
 - **Website:** trioweb.org
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- **Help Hope Live**
 - **Focus:** Community Fundraising (Assistance for community-based fundraising to help patients with unmet medical expenses).
 - **Website:** helphopelive.org
- **Digital Private Groups (Facebook/Subreddits)**

- **Focus: 24/7, Unfiltered Dialogue** (Patient-vetted groups on platforms like Facebook and Reddit for discussing sensitive topics: meds, sex, mental health).
- **Example:** Search Facebook for “Liver Transplant Support” or Reddit for relevant transplant subreddits.
- **Special Interest Groups (SIGs)**
- **Focus:** Clinician-Patient Collaboration (Groups within professional organizations like AASLD that work to bridge clinical care and patient-relevant issues).
- **Location:** Found within the respective professional society websites.
- **Right Here Right Now**

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Karen Hoyt

Karen Hoyt offers a no nonsense approach to living with Cirrhosis. A Hepatitis C, Liver Cancer, and Transplant Survivor, she created a liver loving diet and lifestyle that allows her to spread awareness and advocate for her Best Friends at <https://www.ihelpc.com>

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