

# Liver transplant program in the UAE

## February 2018 to January 2019 – A joint Italian - UAE achievement

Antonio D. Pinna, MD

Digestive Disease Institute, Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

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### **Q. Professor Pinna, what drove the choice of establishing a liver transplant centre in Abu Dhabi?**

Establishing a new liver transplant program may not be as difficult as one may expect if you do it in a country with some experience of transplantation and with healthcare structures already involved in the transplant field. It is entirely different if you want to start a liver transplant program from scratch in a country where there is no background in transplantation or organ donation.

The challenge to develop a liver transplant program in the UAE was a chimera just a few years ago and was not considered worthwhile. These considerations were mostly due to a lack of a donor network system and the fact that most patients used to get a liver transplant abroad with government coverage.

### **Q. What regulatory barriers had to be overcome in the pursuit of such an ambitious program?**

First, a Brain Death Donor decree was passed and education/training for physicians and nurses was started. Between December 2017 and January 2018, a waiting list of potential candidates for liver transplant was created and on 1st February 2018 we performed our first cadaveric liver transplant at the Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi (CCAD).

### **Q. Can the living donor program fill the gap of scarcity of cadaveric donations in the region?**

The increased amount of potential patients who can benefit from a liver transplant and the still scarce amount of cadaveric brain death donors, prompted our team to launch the Living Donor Liver Transplant Program. With this procedure a relative donates a small portion of his/her liver to the patient who will undergo the transplant. The liver will regenerate both in the donor and in the recipient resulting in two full livers from one. This is considered the most advanced and complex surgical procedure in the transplant and surgical field.

### **Q. What has the transplant activity volume of your centre been so far?**

By January 2019 we had performed 11 liver transplants, four of them from living donors. Three patients, 2 from cadaveric donors and one from a living donor, were transplanted in very sick conditions and had a very poor prognosis without transplant. All the transplanted patients are doing well with good liver function.

This can be considered a success story with an Italian imprint.