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Patients' stories

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### Alfredo's story

**Alfredo Valenza was 25 years old when he got sick. After 10 years his liver cirrhosis had considerably worsened:** "The veins in my esophagus were covered with varices, which often ruptured and had to be closed. My life was hanging by a thread." Alfredo flew to Germany in an attempt to undergo a liver transplant, but the German hospital refused to enroll him on the waiting list: "They said Italy wasn't contributing enough to donations."

**He was referred to Cervello hospital, and then to ISMETT, where clinical activity had just began.** "I was transplanted on August 4, 1999. I was 35, and the second liver transplant recipient in Sicily. I felt like a guinea pig, but I was really happy". After 17 days, Alfredo was sent home with a new liver. His story was published on newspapers, and one day he received a phone call.

**On the other end were the parents of a victim of a fatal accident, the boy who had donated the liver.** That was the beginning of a special relationship: "They became my second family: christenings, birthdays, weddings, we spent it all together. It was amazing. I almost died twenty years ago. Maybe I survived because I have a role in this world: make everyone aware of the importance of organ donations."

Alfredo is a driving instructor and meets many young people driving around the streets of Partinico, where he lives, or when he teaches road safety education to children. "I explain the rules for safe driving and at the end I take a few minutes to talk about the importance of organ donation. It is the best thing in the world, because part of the departed continues to live through somebody else."

### Antonino's story

**Antonino Bertolone is too moved to speak, his voice cracking with emotion.** His wife Carmela tells the story: "Antonino was suffering from hepatitis C, which progressed to liver cirrhosis. He was very sick before the surgery. Every week we drove 250 km from our hometown Bronte (near Catania) to Palermo in order for Antonino to undergo a paracentesis session, and remove the fluids from his abdomen. He was increasingly worn out, skinny, and tired. He couldn't lay in bed as the cough would shake up his entire body. He had to sleep in a chair. **We went to Turin** to assess his eligibility for a liver transplant, **but they didn't enroll him on the waiting list.**"

**The couple contacted ISMETT. Antonino was admitted on July 26, 1999, and underwent the transplant between August 7 and 8.** "They informed me an organ has become available for Antonino. They told me to wait before telling me, since they wanted to be certain about the compatibility. I was so happy I was unable to wait and told him immediately. We had been waiting so long, we had suffered so much... Luckily that liver was good for him. He went in the operating room at 6 a.m. He came out the following morning at 6 a.m. He was 56 years old and a father to 4 children."

**Today Antonino is 76, he has his normal aches and pains, but he's sure about one thing: the last twenty years have been the best gift he could have ever possibly hoped for.** "We celebrate the date of his transplant every year, like a birthday, because that day Antonino was born again," says Carmela.