To the Editor:

Clinical and laboratory follow-up for living kidney donors (LKDs) may quantify risk, prompt early intervention, and inform donor candidates and donors. In 1999, the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) requested that US transplant centers submit LKD follow-up forms 6 and 12 months after donation. Additional elements such as insurance status were added in 2004, with follow-up extended to 24 months in 2008. Noting poor performance, in 2013, the OPTN defined minimum transplant center follow-up thresholds, targeted to ≥80% and ≥70% for clinical and laboratory data, respectively.

Postdonation follow-up poses financial and logistical challenges for both donors and transplant programs. Currently, no mechanism exists for reimbursing donors or programs for mandate-related costs. Previous studies have reported lower postdonation follow-up in uninsured living donors, but this has not been examined in contemporary practice.

Hypothesizing that lack of insurance may pose a barrier to follow-up care after donation, the American Society of Transplantation Living Donor Community of Practice Finance Workgroup examined contemporary trends in national registry data.

We conducted a retrospective cohort study of LKDs in the United States using Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (SRTR) data. This study of de-identified, publicly available data was deemed human subjects exempt by the Institutional Review Board of Saint Louis University, which includes waiver of individual informed consent for data analysis.

We examined associations of LKD insurance status for donations from the start of the OPTN follow-up mandate in February 2013 to December 2018, with postdonation follow-up. Donors were categorized as insured or uninsured at the time of donation. The primary dual outcomes were complete clinical and laboratory follow-up at 6, 12, and 24 months postdonation, based on the OPTN requirements (Table S1). Follow-up records were examined through February 29, 2020 (before the COVID-19 pandemic).

Multivariable regression modeling, including adjustment for donation year and baseline demographic characteristics captured in the registry (Table S2), was used to examine the association of insurance status and the outcomes of clinical and laboratory follow-up (given as adjusted odds ratio [AOR] with 95% confidence limits [CL]). Data management and analyses were performed with SAS for Windows, version 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc).

Among adult LKDs recorded in the SRTR database in 2004-2018, the proportion with missing insurance status decreased over time (Fig S1). This analysis included 33,522 LKDs during the study period with insurance status; 90% (n = 30,298) were insured. Compared with insured donors, uninsured donors were more likely to be younger, male, African American, Hispanic, biologically related to their recipient, single, grade school or high school educated, and unemployed; to have a history of smoking; to have obesity; and to have donated earlier (Table S2).

Overall, clinical follow-up was more complete than laboratory follow-up at 6, 12, and 24 months (Table S3). Follow-up was less common in uninsured than insured donors (Fig 1). At 24 months postdonation, 73% and 80%
of uninsured and insured donors had clinical follow-up, respectively ($P < 0.001$). After multivariable regression, uninsured status was associated with 19% lower odds of clinical follow-up (AOR, 0.81 [95% CL, 0.72-0.90]) and 16% lower odds of laboratory follow-up (AOR, 0.84 [95% CL, 0.77-0.91]) at 6 months (Fig 2, Table S4). Similar patterns were seen at 12 and 24 months’ follow-up.

In this large cohort study of US LKDs, 10% of donors were uninsured and uninsured status was associated with less clinical and laboratory follow-up. Non-White donors and those with less favorable social determinants of health were less likely to be insured, a concerning pattern given known similar disparities in kidney disease risk factors such as obesity, hypertension, and diabetes.

A prior study of US LKDs from 2008-2012 found that lack of health insurance was significantly associated with follow-up deficiencies 12 months postdonation. Our work advances these findings with a larger cohort after implementation of the OPTN follow-up mandate and passage of the Affordable Care Act. We found that the association of lack of insurance with reduced follow-up persists at 24 months postdonation.

The OPTN follow-up mandate aimed to improve donor follow-up, yet the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services cost report excludes costs of routine postdonation follow-up. Since failure to meet minimum reporting standards may have regulatory consequences for programs, effects may include more stringent donor acceptance criteria or the development of alternate approaches to cover follow-up costs.

Our analysis’ strengths include its national scope and large sample size. Limitations include lack of information on insurance status after donation. Uninsured status may be a surrogate for other unmeasured factors. Care and patient populations may vary by center. Some donors may have received follow-up care that was not known to the center or not reported by the center.

Resources are needed to provide follow-up care for at-risk LKDs. Recently, the SRTR launched the Living Donor Collective to determine the feasibility of capturing long-

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**Figure 2. Adjusted associations of baseline characteristics at the time of donation with postdonation clinical and laboratory follow-up at 6 months.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Insured at donation</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age at donation (y)</td>
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<td>35 to 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI at donation (kg/m²)</td>
<td>&lt;18.5</td>
<td>18.5 to &lt;25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to recipient</td>
<td>Biologically Related</td>
<td>Spouse/Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Married/Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>College/Higher</td>
<td>Grade/High School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
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<td>Not Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension history</td>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking history</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donation era</td>
<td>Feb-Dec 2013</td>
<td>2014 to 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Adjusted Odds Ratio for Clinical Follow-up**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypertension history</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smoking history</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donation era</td>
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**Adjusted Odds Ratio for Laboratory Follow-up**
Supplementary Material

Supplementary File (PDF)
Figure S1; Tables S1-S4.

Article Information

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Disclaimer: The SRTR system includes data on all US donors, waitlist candidates, and transplant recipients submitted by members of the OPTN. The interpretation and reporting of these data are the responsibility of the authors and in no way should be seen as an official policy of or interpretation by the SRTR, the US Government, or funding agencies.

Data Sharing: Individual participant de-identified data will not be shared by the authors due to restrictions of data use agreements. SRTR registry data can be obtained from the SRTR.

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References


