Dr. Thomas Varghese, thoracic surgeon and an Associate Professor in the Department of Surgery at UW Medicine, is medical director of a program in Washington state, Strong for Surgery, which has joined with partners including the American College of Surgeons to provide preoperative checklists focusing on risk factors that can be modified before surgery.

Often patients may only get a sheet of instructions a day or two before surgery on how to prepare for the procedure. Strong for Surgery checklists are meant to be reviewed much earlier—in an initial consultation between the doctor and patient, who also is provided a packet of educational materials to take home.

The checklist focuses on four issues: smoking, nutrition, blood sugar control and medication. Smoking, for example, can impair the ability to withstand anesthesia, increase the risk of respiratory complications after surgery such as pneumonia and interfere with wound healing.

The Strong for Surgery checklist also includes a recommendation that patients and doctors review all medications, including herbal remedies that patients may not think to disclose. Ginkgo biloba for instance, can cause bleeding problems and hormone therapy can increase the risk of blood clots after surgery.

A version of this article appeared October 23, 2012, on page D1 in the U.S. edition of The Wall Street Journal, with the headline: Need Surgery? You Might Have to Get Healthier First.

- The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has recognized UW Medicine’s heart, kidney and liver transplant programs as national leaders in their fields.

  The Health Resources and Services Administration’s Donation and Transplantation Community of Practice program gave these awards based on key performance measurements, including how quickly patients received a transplant after being placed on the waiting list, post-transplant graft survival rates, and patient mortality rates while waiting for an organ to become available.