

HANDS-ONHealth

Health Wave Newsletter, February 2008

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“GIVE THE GIFT OF LIFE” February 14th is National Donor Day

(Source: Organdonor.gov)*

- Approximately 77 people receive organ transplants each day
- 19 people die each day waiting for transplants that can't take place because of the shortage of donated organs.
- Each organ and tissue donor saves or improves the lives of as many as 50 people.
- Giving the "Gift of Life" may lighten the grief of the donor's own family. Many donor families say that knowing other lives have been saved helps them cope with their tragic loss.

The **Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network**, under contract to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ensures fair distribution of donated organs in the United States. It is the model for transplant systems around the world.

* The official U.S. Government web site for organ and tissue donation and transplantation, www.organdonor.gov, is maintained by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Healthcare Systems Bureau (HSB), Division of Transplantation, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human.

In This Newsletter: Give The Gift of Life

In honor of National Donor Day on February 14th this month's newsletter is dedicated to raising the awareness to the need for donors. Learn who can donate, what can be donated and how to get started. Also included are Frequently Asked Questions and information on a high school program (see [page 2](#)) to integrate the topic of organ and tissue donation into existing curriculum.

Who Can Donate?

Most People Can Donate Organs and/or Tissue

All people of *all* ages should consider themselves potential organ and tissue donors—there are no strict upper or lower age limits. There are few absolute exclusions [HIV positive, active cancer, systemic infection]. Potential donors will be evaluated for suitability when the occasion arises.

You Are Never Too Old

The condition of your organs is more important than age. Someone 35 years old with a history of alcohol abuse may have a liver that is in worse condition than someone 60 years old who has never consumed alcohol. In addition, people on the waiting list might need to be transplanted with an organ that is less than ideal if there is no other suitable organ available in time to save their lives. Doctors will examine your organs and determine whether they are suitable for donation if the situation arises. **If you are under 18, you will need the permission of a parent or guardian to donate.**

Existing Medical Condition/s Doesn't Rule You Out

You may still be able to donate your organs. Doctors will evaluate the condition of your organs when the time arises. The transplant team's decision will be based on a combination of factors, such as the type of illness you have had, your physical condition at the time of your death, and the types of organs and tissues that would be donated.

What Can Be Donated?

Organs

The organs of the body that can be transplanted at the current time are kidneys, heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, and the intestines. Kidney/pancreas transplants, heart/lung transplants, and other

combined organ transplants also are performed. Organs cannot be stored and must be used within hours of removing them from the donor's body. Most donated organs are from people who have died, but a living individual can donate a kidney, part of the pancreas, part of a lung, part of the liver, or part of the intestine.

Local organ procurement organizations** (OPOs) around the country coordinate organ donation. OPOs evaluate potential donors, discuss donation with surviving family members, and arrange for the surgical removal and transport of donated organs. A national computer network, the OPTN (Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network) matches donated organs with recipients throughout the country.

**http://www.organdonor.gov/organizations/organ_procurement.htm

Tissue

Corneas, the middle ear, skin, heart valves, bone, veins, cartilage, tendons, and ligaments can be stored in tissue banks and used to restore sight, cover burns, repair hearts, replace veins, and mend damaged connective tissue and cartilage in recipients.

Decision: Donation—A School Program That Gives the Gift of Life was created in response to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' former Secretary, Tommy G. Thompson's, vision of a model instructional package for high schools that will educate the nation's youth about the importance of organ and tissue donation and the need to make an informed decision about whether to be a donor and share their donation wishes with their families.

This multifaceted set of materials—print, video, CD-ROM, and web-based—can be used by both public and private educators to integrate the topic of organ and tissue donation into existing curriculum and training programs.

<http://www.organdonor.gov/student/about.asp>



Stem Cells

Healthy adults between the ages of 18-60 can donate blood stem cells. In order for a blood stem cell transplant to be successful, the patient and the blood stem cell donor must have a closely matched tissue. Since tissue types are inherited, patients are more likely to find a matched donor within their own racial and ethnic group.

Blood and Platelets

Blood and platelets are formed by the body, go through a life cycle, and are continuously replaced throughout life. This means that you can donate blood and platelets more than once. It is safe to donate blood every 56 days and platelets twice in one week up to 24 times a year.

Blood is stored in a blood bank according to type (A, B, AB, or O) and Rh factor (positive or negative). Blood can be used whole, or separated into packed red cells, plasma, and platelets, all of which have different lifesaving uses. It takes only about 10 minutes to collect a unit (one pint) of blood, although the testing and screening process means that you will be at the donation center close to an hour.

Platelets are tiny cell fragments that circulate throughout the blood and aid in blood clotting. Platelets can

be donated without donating blood. When a specific patient needs platelets, but does not need blood, a matching donor is found and platelets are separated from the rest of the blood which is returned to the donor. The donor's body will replace the missing platelets within a few hours.

How to Get Started?

- **Talk to your family** now about your donation decision. Help your family understand your wish to be an organ and tissue donor before a crisis occurs. Then they will be prepared to serve as your advocate for donation.
- **Register** with your state donor registry. Most states, but not all, have donor registries. (http://www.organdonor.gov/organizations/organ_procurement.htm)
- **Designate your decision on your driver's license.** Do this when you obtain or renew your license.
- **Sign a donor card now.** Carry the donor card with you until you can designate your donation decision on your driver's license or join a donor registry. (print out the donor card page at the end of this newsletter or go to <ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/osp/newdonor-card.pdf> to print out)

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Frequently Asked Questions

Question: How many people are currently waiting for each organ to become available so they can have a transplant?

Answer: The number of patients now on the waiting list and other data are available at Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network: <http://www.optn.org>. The number of people requiring a life-saving transplant continues to rise faster than the number of available donors. Approximately 300 new transplant candidates are added to the waiting list each month.

Question: Why should minorities be particularly concerned about organ donation?

Answer: Minorities overall have a particularly high need for organ transplants because some diseases of the kidney, heart, lung, pancreas, and liver are found more frequently in racial and ethnic minority populations than in the general population. For example, African Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics are three times more likely than Whites to suffer from end-stage renal (kid-

ney) disease, often as the result of high blood pressure and other conditions that can damage the kidneys. Native Americans are four times more likely than Whites to suffer from diabetes. Some of these conditions that can result in organ failure are best treated through transplantation and others can only be treated by this life-saving procedure. In addition, similar blood type is essential in matching donors to recipients. Because certain blood types are more common in ethnic minority populations, increasing the number of minority donors can increase the frequency of minority transplants.

For more information on minorities and organ donation, visit the Web site of the National Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program at www.mottep.org (not a U.S. Government Web site).

Question: Are there any costs to my family for donation?

Answer: No. Your family pays for your medical care and funeral costs, but not for organ donation. Costs related to donation are paid by the recipient, usually through insurance, Medicare, or Medicaid.

Question: If I sign a donor card or indicate my donation preferences on my driver's license, will my wishes be carried out?

Answer: Even if you sign a donor card it is essential that your family know your wishes. Your family may be asked to sign a consent form in order for your donation to occur. If you wish to learn how organ donation preferences are documented and honored where you live, contact your local organ procurement organization (OPO). The OPO can advise you of specific local procedures, such as joining donor registries that are available to residents in your area.

Question: How are donated organs distributed?



Answer: Patients are matched to organs based on a number of factors including blood and tissue typing, medical need, time on the waiting list, and geographical location.

Question: If I sign a donor card, will it affect the quality of medical care I receive at the hospital?

Answer: No! The medical team trying to save your life is separate from the transplant team. Every effort is made to save your life before donation is considered.

Question: If I would like to donate a kidney to someone I know who is in need, how can I be tested to see if I am a match?

Answer: Within the United States, living donations of a kidney can be made to a family member, friend, or anyone on the waiting list. Living donations are arranged through one of several transplant centers throughout the U.S. Before anyone can be considered as a donor, the individual must undergo a complete physical, as well as a psychosocial evaluation by the transplant center where they intend to make the donation. The internet is a good source of living donor information on sites such as the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) – www.unos.org – on the Living Donation page (http://www.unos.org/living_donation.asp) and the National Kidney Foundation (<http://www.kidney.org/atoz/atozItem.cfm?id=48>). UNOS is our Federal contractor that manages the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) – www.optn.org. UNOS has a toll free number for any questions you may have about living donation, transplant centers, or the transplant process. The number is 1-888-TXINFO1 (894-6361).

 **Organ/Tissue Donor Card** 



I wish to donate my organs and tissues. I wish to give:

any needed organs and tissues only the following organs and tissues:

Donor Signature _____ Date _____

Witness _____

Witness _____

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