Organ Donation

Organ transplantation can be lifesaving for patients with organ failure. Thousands of those patients may die because there are not enough donated organs to meet the demand. The main factor limiting organ donation is that less than half of the families of potential donors consent to donation. The January 9/16, 2008, issue of *JAMA* includes an article reporting on disparities in access to organ transplantation between rural and urban populations. This Patient Page is updated from one published in the July 4, 2001, issue of *JAMA*.

WHAT IS DONATED?

Many organs can be donated, including heart, intestines, kidneys, liver, lungs, and pancreas. Tissues that can be donated include corneas, heart valves, and skin. Donations may be used in people who have organ failure, who are blind, or who have severe burns or serious diseases. If you wish, you may specify which organs and tissues you would like to donate. While you are alive, you may donate a kidney or part of your liver to a specific matched patient.

Type of Transplant	No. of Patients Waiting for Transplant
Kidney	73 909
Liver	16 704
Heart	2687
Kidney-pancreas	2299
Lung	2276
Pancreas	1643
Intestine	227
Heart-lung	106
Total*	97 400

Source: UNOS, national patient waiting list data as of December 7, 2007.

*Total may be less than the sum due to patients included in multiple categories.

STEPS TO TAKE TO ENSURE DONATION

- Inform your family, friends, and physician that you wish be a donor.
- Fill out a donor card and the back of your driver's license and keep copies with your physician, family, and attorney and in your wallet and the glove compartment of your car.
- Assign a health care proxy or a medical power of attorney, a document that indicates whom you trust to make medical decisions for you. This can be a physician, a friend, or a family member.
- Prepare and sign a living will and an advance care directive—legal documents that state your wishes in the event you become incapable of communicating.

SOME FACTS ABOUT BEING A DONOR

- Documenting that you are a donor will not affect your treatment in an emergency; the first emphasis is always to attempt to save your life.
- Recipients of organs are chosen by severity of illness, time spent on a waiting list, and medical factors, not by economic or celebrity status.
- There are no age limits for donors.
- There is never a charge to your family if you are an organ donor.
- Most religions support organ donation.
- Your body will not be disfigured (for funeral services).

Follow the steps above to be sure your wishes are followed. If you are not currently registered to be an organ and tissue donor, consider giving the gift of life to someone who needs it.

Sources: United Network for Organ Sharing, National Institutes of Health, Health Resources and Services Administration/Department of Health and Human Services

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS)
  www.unos.org
- Donate Life America
  www.donatelife.net
- Health Resources and Services Administration/Department of Health and Human Services
  www.organdonor.gov
- Transplant Recipients International Organization Inc
  www.trioweb.org

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