Organ Donations: Spreading Awareness

There is a lack of organ donors in America. People can now become organ donors by changing their status online.

Tag Words: organ donors, donor status change, donate life, organ donors myths and facts

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Summary

In America, an average of 18 people die each day because of lack of available organs for transplant. Some people are probably scared off with the myths surrounding organ donations, and others probably just don’t feel like taking the time out of their busy schedule to take a trip to the Department of Motor Vehicles. New to New Jersey, all residents now have the option to change their organ donor status online. By spreading awareness of the need for organ donors and that it takes less than five minutes to become one, we will help save countless lives. Become a donor, Save a life!
The Issue: Lack of Organ Donations

Although willingness to donate has risen in recent years, major obstacles still remain. Unfortunately, there are many people within our society who believe incorrectly that patients who might otherwise be saved are sometimes “killed” for their organs. However, strict regulations are in place to protect human lives and to prevent this from happening.

There are several ways to increase the supply of organs. For starters, persuading more people to agree to be donors when they die, putting hospital policies and procedures in place to foster organ donation, obtaining more organs donated from the victims of brain death and cardiac death and increasing the number of live donors, especially people unrelated to the recipients.

Most importantly we also would to let our community know that age is no longer a limit to donation, so consider indicating willingness to be a donor on your driver’s license or in your living will. However, these are not the only process by which you can be considered an organ donor. If someone does not feel comfortable with putting there wishes on their driver’s license they can also tell their next of kin or family doctor that they want to be a donor. But most importantly someone who wants to be a donor can also obtain and sign an organ donor card to carry with them. A card can be obtained through www.organdonor.gov.

Problems: Statistics

- More than 100,000 men, women, and children currently need life-saving organ transplants. Every 11 minutes another name is added to the national organ transplant waiting list.
- An average of 18 people die each day from the lack of available organs for transplant.
- In 2008, there were 7,984 deceased organ donors and 6,218 living organ donors resulting in 27,961 organ transplants.
- In 2007, approximately 30,000 grafts were made available for transplant by eye banks within the United States.
- According to research, 98% of all adults have heard about organ donation and 86% have heard of tissue donation.
- 90% of Americans say they support donation, but only 30% know the essential steps to take to be a donor.

Problems: Myths

- Myth No. 1. If I agree to donate my organs, the attending physician or emergency room staff won't try to save my life. They'll remove my organs as soon as possible to save somebody else.
- Reality: When you go to the hospital for treatment, doctors focus on saving your life — not somebody else's.
- Myth No. 2. What if I’m not actually dead when they sign my death certificate? It'll be too late
for me if they've taken my organs for transplantation. I might have otherwise recovered.

Reality: A physician is not going to declare a person dead without first going through the necessary steps to make sure they're really dead.

Myth No. 3. Organ donation is against my religion.

Reality: Organ donation is consistent with the beliefs of most religions.

- This includes Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam and most branches of Judaism. If you're unsure of or uncomfortable with your faith's position on donation, ask a member of your clergy.

Myth No. 4. People under eighteen years of age are too young to make this decision.

Reality: That's true, in a legal sense. But the minor's parents can authorize this decision. If you are under eighteen, you can express to your parents your wish to donate, and your parents can give their consent knowing that it's what you wanted. Children, too, are in need of organ transplants, and they usually need organs smaller than those an adult can provide.

Myth No. 5. I want or my loved one wants to have an open-casket funeral. That can't happen if his or her organs or tissues have been donated.

Reality: Organ and tissue donation doesn't interfere with having an open-casket funeral. The donor's body is clothed for burial, so there are no visible signs of organ or tissue donation.

- For eye donation, an artificial eye is inserted, the lids are closed and set during embalming, and no one can tell any difference.

For bone donation, a rod is inserted where bone is removed.

With skin donation, a very thin layer of skin similar to a sunburn peel is taken from the donor's back. Because the donor is clothed and lying on his or her back in the casket, no one can see any difference.

Myth No. 6. Elderly people are not candidates for organ donation.

Reality: That's false. There's no defined age limit for donating organs. Organs have been successfully transplanted from donors in their 70s and 80s. The decision to use your organs is based on strict medical criteria, not age. Don't disqualify yourself prematurely. Let the doctors decide at your time of death whether your organs and tissues are suitable for transplantation.

Myth No. 7. I'm in poor health or my eyesight is weak. Nobody would want my organs or tissues.

Reality: Overall, that's not true. Very few medical conditions automatically prevent you from donating organs. The decision to use an organ is based on strict medical criteria. It may turn out that certain organs are not suitable for transplantation, but other organs and tissues may be fine. Don't automatically count out donation if it's something you want to do. Only medical professionals at the time of your death can determine whether your organs are suitable for transplantation.

Myth No. 8. I hear you can't donate to someone unless you're a close family member.

Reality: Whether it's a distant family member, friend or complete stranger, you can donate an organ through as long as certain qualifications are a match.

Myth No. 9. The rich and powerful always seem to move to the front of the line when they need a donor organ. There's no way to ensure that my organs will go to those who've waited the longest or are the neediest.

Reality: The rich and famous aren't given priority when it comes to allocating organs. It may seem that way because of the amount of publicity generated when celebrities receive a transplant, but they are treated no differently from anyone else. In fact, the United Network for
Organ Sharing (UNOS), the organization responsible for maintaining the national organ transplant network, subjects all celebrity transplants to an internal audit to make sure the organ allocation was appropriate.  

**Myth No. 10.** My family will be charged if I donate my organs.  

**Reality:** The organ donor's family is never charged for donating. The family is charged for the cost of the medical care you received to save your life, and those costs are sometimes misinterpreted as costs related to organ donation. Costs for organ removal go to the transplant recipient.

**The Service Project: Spreading Awareness**

For our service project we decided to spread awareness about the need for organ donations. We provided people with information about the truths and myths of organ donation and providing them with a website that enables you to change your organ donation status online. Our belief is that without a trip to the Department of Motor Vehicles, it is much easier to convince someone that signing up to be an organ donor is the right thing to do.

We went about completing our service project by setting up a table at the Cook Campus Center, one of the busiest places on campus. We chose this place because there is always a lot of foot traffic and the time that was available was during lunch, one of the busiest times of the day. We set up a couple of signs on the table that are included in this classipedia. Also, we attached the web address that one can change their organ donation status online to a blowpop. By adding the candy, it gave the passerby more incentive to come learn about the information we were trying to share. We taped the website onto a piece of paper cut into a heart. On the heart we also wrote, “Become an Organ Donor, Save a Life!” Also, we e-mailed Donate Life America to tell them to advertise the online status change.

Another way to spread awareness about the importance of organ donations is through public service announcements. Donor1.org has created the Annual Dash for Organ and Tissue Awareness. More than 6,000 participants partook in this event this year. A total of $291,259 was raised for public service announcements to support organ donations.

Overall, we think people responded positively to our service project. The people we interacted with weren’t concerned about the myths. This might have been because we were working with a more informed audience of college students. Although we don’t know if everyone went home and changed their status, some people did assure us that they would. People are turned off at the idea of waiting in line, or even taking a trip to the DMV, because its time consuming and annoying. Spreading awareness about the ease of the status change and that it takes less than five minutes will convince people that it’s worth the five minutes to save someone’s life.

**References**

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https://emvc.state.nj.us/MVC_DLNJ/AVSStart.jsp
The thought of organ donations is not a subject that gets a lot of attention. Most people are scared off at the idea because of the myths surrounding the process. The truth is, over 79,000 patients in America are currently waiting for an organ transplant; nearly 3,000 new patients are added to the waiting list each month. Every day, at least 10 people die while waiting for a transplant of a vital organ. It is heartbreaking at the high amount of preventable deaths when such a simple solution is at hand. As Americans, we owe it to our fellow citizens that are sick to do whatever we can to help. Whether it be donating blood, donating bone marrow, or changing our organ donor status on our licenses; it makes a difference. Giving the gift of life is the greatest gift you can give. New to New Jersey, state residents can now change their donor status on a driver’s license without a trip to the Department of Motor Vehicles. Simply go to https://emvc.state.nj.us/MVC_DLNJ/AVSStart.jsp and it takes less than five minutes to fill out. If more people were aware about this fact, it would create more of an incentive to give the gift of life from their own home. We have the power to change someone's world by being a donor. It's about living. It's about Life.''

Appendices

Posters
Note: they begin on the next page. There are a total of 3.
Donate Life

Together We Can Make a Difference

Register Today and Save a Life:
https://emvc.state.nj.us/MVC_DLNJ/AVSStart.jsp
Obtain Your Donor Card at:
www.organdonor.gov

- Over 79,000 U.S. patients are currently waiting for an organ transplant; nearly 3,000 new patients are added to the waiting list each month.
- Every day, 16 to 17 people die while waiting for a transplant of a vital organ, such as a heart, liver, kidney, pancreas, lung or bone marrow.
- Because of the lack of available donors in this country, 2,025 kidney patients, 1,347 liver patients, 458 heart patients and 361 lung patients died in 2001 while waiting for life-saving organ transplants.
- Nearly 10 percent of the patients currently waiting for liver transplants are young people under 18 years of age.
- Acceptable organ donors can range in age from newborn to 65 years or more. People who are 65 years of age or older may be acceptable donors, particularly of corneas, skin, bone and for total body donation.
- An estimated 10,000 to 14,000 people who die each year meet the criteria for organ donation, but less than half of that number become actual organ donors.

Did You Know?

90% of Americans say they support donation, but only 30% know the essential steps to take to be a donor

We Are the Answer!!