

Features of organ donation

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Today I'll be talking about organ donation. Organ donation is the process of giving an organ or a part of an organ for the purpose of transplantation into another person. In order for a person to become an organ donor, blood and oxygen must flow through the organs until the time of recovery to ensure viability. This requires that a person die under circumstances that have resulted in an irreparable neurological injury, usually from massive trauma to the brain such as aneurysm, stroke or automobile accident.

Only after all efforts to save the patient's life have been exhausted, tests are performed to confirm the absence of brain or brain stem activity, and brain death has been declared, is donation a possibility. The state donor registry is searched to determine if the patient has personally consented to donation. If the potential donor is not found on the registry, his or her legally authorized representative (usually a spouse, relative or close friend) is offered the opportunity to authorize the donation.

Once the donation decision is established, the family is asked to provide a medical and social history. Donation professionals determine which organs can be transplanted and to which patients on the national transplant waiting list the organs are to be allocated. Tissue, such as skin, and heart valves can be recovered from brain dead donors who can also donate solid organs. If a donor is declared to have died because his or her heart stopped beating (not brain death), then the individual can only be a potential tissue and eye (cornea) donor.

Unlike the waiting list for organs, there is no formal database for those who need a tissue transplant. But at a moment's notice, tissue has to be made available. For example, in the case of a burn victim, the availability of skin

can mean the difference between survival and death. Each day, averages of 75 people receive organ transplants. However, an average of 20 people die each day waiting for transplants that can't take place because of the shortage of donated organs. Organ transplantation has become an accepted medical treatment for end-stage organ failure.

Statistics can sometimes be overwhelming and difficult to understand. One thing to remember is that every number in the statistic you view is a person, a person who both needs your help and is waiting for a lifesaving transplant or a person who has left a lasting legacy through organ and tissue donation. Either way, each number represents a life, like I said earlier, usually a loved one or someone close to you. Statistics change. Some change day to day, and some can even change minute to minute.

You may ask why this happens. There are several reasons. One of the most confusing statistics is the number of persons waiting for a transplant. Patients are allowed to register at multiple transplant centers so you may see a higher number if you count "registrations" rather than "candidates." Additionally, one of the great things that may happen is that donations and transplantations may be taking place at any time, so while the waiting list might continue to grow the number of donors may also rise.