
The Process of Organ Donation

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Informative

Organ and tissue donation is a complicated process that takes place more than 50 times a day. Though it may involve persons living or (brain) dead, most transplants take place using organs or tissues from a deceased individual.

The first step to becoming an organ donor is registering to become one. Interestingly enough, minorities are among the least likely to enroll as a donor, while they are the most in need. According to New Mexico Donor Services, 72% of organ donations are for minority patients, but, only 27% of minorities donate organs. This is a growing problem as minority populations are increasing faster than the number of minority donors. Being a registered donor is important because it makes the process easier when a patient is deceased or incapacitated enough to not make the decision for themselves. We should encourage organ and tissue donation by minorities especially in New Mexico where most of our population is considered to be a minority (Hispanics). Registering also removes the burden from a grieving family because the decision has already been made.

The next thing to occur in the organ donation process is the donor's admittance to a hospital or other medical facility. Here, the doctors and nurses will try their best to save the patient from whatever illnesses or injuries they have. A common misconception about donors who are in the hospital is their mistreatment by medical professionals. This thinking is completely unjustified. First, doctors do not discriminate against patients who are organ donors. They are given the exact same care as other patients and doctors use all of the same life-saving techniques regardless of donation status. There is also no reason for a patient to think that the doctors will declare them to be dead before they are actually beyond saving. This makes sure that the doctor is focusing on saving the donor's life, not saving the would-be organ recipient.

Another safeguard to the process of donation is the process in which a donor is selected

for donation. First, the doctors and other medical staff declare brain death on the patient. Then, they report their standings to the Organ Procurement Organization (OPO), who look to see if the patient is a candidate for donation. They will obtain consent either from their records of donor registry or the patient's next-of-kin.

Once consent is given, the family will release the entirety of the patient's social and medical records to the OPO. This will help them identify which organs are viable for donation. Another misconception about this part of donation is that age and all previous or current illnesses rule out patients as organ or tissue donors. This is untrue and people of any age are encouraged to become donors. Also, most health conditions will not prevent a patient from becoming a donor. It is the doctor's and OPO's job to assess a patient's organs at the time of death.

If the patient's medical records don't prevent them from donating, the OPO will contact the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) to find a recipient for the viable organs or tissues. They are matched to certain patients based on the following factors: "blood type, tissue type, height, weight, the length of time the patient has been waiting, the severity of the patient's illness, and the distance between the donor's and the recipient's hospitals." (Organization) No other factors are considered, contrary to the common fallacy that social status, gender, race and income are used to identify the recipients. One donor can donate to many recipients. About 75% of donors give to a person in the same region, so a local individual usually benefits from organ or tissue donation (Organization).

During this time between matching a donor with a recipient and actually harvesting the organs or tissues, the donor's body is maintained by the hospital staff. The patient is hooked up to a life-support machine and each organ that is being donated is monitored. This is to make sure that the organ remains healthy and can still be given to the patient in need.

The next step in the process of organ donation is the surgery to remove the organs or tissues. It is done in the same manner that other surgeries are performed, with sterile equipment and careful precision. Tissues, like bone, cornea and skin, are removed after the organs are harvested. Every incision is closed which allows the donor's family to have an open-casket funeral if they wish. This concludes the donor and their family's participation in the transplanting process, as the body is released to the family after surgery.

Because the tissue and organs must still be viable by the time they reach the recipient, time is of the essence. Therefore, ambulances or helicopters are commonly used to transport the donations from hospital to hospital. The recipient is usually waiting at the hospital and may even be in the operating room already when the organ arrives. Doctors and other medical professionals work around the clock to perform these life-saving operations because they are so time-sensitive.

Once the transplant occurs, the recipient is not always out of danger. Transplant rejection is when the recipient's body sees the new organ or tissue as a threat and attacks it. This only happens to a small percentage of the population because of immunosuppression drugs that are now prescribed for every patient. Usually, a simple adjustment of the dosage of these drugs stops the immune system from attacking and allows the recipient's body to slowly adjust to the new organ or tissue.

After this lengthy process, involving many agencies and individuals in various professions, a life may have been lost, but another has been renewed.

On a personal note, I fully support organ donation solely for the fact that it saves lives. All of my grandparents passed away from illnesses that could not be cured with organ or tissue donation, but if they had been in need of a donation, I hope that someone would've stepped up to

help them. Doctors and nurses, no matter how incredible they are, cannot cure every illness or heal any injury, and that's where other people are given the opportunity to help individuals beat impossible odds and live another day.

To write this informative essay I used the following sources:

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