

Organ Donation: A Choice

An Informative Essay

By

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When I walked into the Division of Motor Vehicles to receive my provisional license, I wasn't thinking about whether I would choose to be an organ donor or not. My main concerns had to do with looking bad in my license picture and correctly reading the tiny letters and numbers in the vision test. After getting an acceptable picture and passing the vision test, I had to complete a few additional questions before getting the license. This is when the inquiry came up asking if I would like to be a donor. Without too much thought, I checked 'yes.' Reflecting back on it now, I don't know why I made this choice because at that time I had never had any personal experiences with organ donation. Most of my knowledge about organ transplants had come from my *Grey's Anatomy* obsession. Since then, I have learned more about this important topic, and I have never regretted making the decision to be an organ donor. In fact, I have become more confident that it is the right choice to make despite the reasons given by the masses of people that choose not to become organ donors.

I realized the true importance of organ donation when I was sixteen and I participated in a selective internship at my local hospital. I saw numerous patients who were waiting for the donation of a precious organ. They could not do anything but wait even if they were experiencing pain and in that moment, I knew that I would happily donate any of my organs if it would ease the suffering of these sick patients.

Though I am personally more than happy to donate my organs, there is a huge lack of available organs for those in need. According to the Department of Health, there were 116,000+ people on the national organ transplant list as of August 2017 and even though 97% of American adults support organ donation, only 54% are registered as organ donors. The number of available organs is also significantly lowered because it is a rare occurrence when there are new and viable

organs. These facts lead to 20 people dying every single day while waiting for an organ transplant (Brazeir 2016). But this could change if more people registered themselves as organ donors. Through extensive research, it has been discovered that the main reasons for this lack of registration are cultural habits and misunderstandings, distrust in the healthcare system, and religious beliefs.

Sometimes people have beliefs that tend to be more superstitious than religious in nature and this can have an effect on the decision to donate organs. There are some who believe that a portion of the spirit is transferred from the organ donor to the recipient because there are cases where the recipients change after their new organs are transplanted (Irving 2011). For instance, Claire Sylvia received a heart from a young male donor on May 29, 1988. After her transplant, she had an ongoing craving for fast food chicken nuggets, beer, and green peppers, which she had never particularly liked before her transplant. With some research, Claire found and talked to the family of her donor and discovered that the young man had in fact, loved chicken nuggets, beer, and green peppers. Although there is no concrete proof of why this transference of memories or traits occurs, there are many examples of this type of situation and this causes some to be wary of organ donation (Joshi 2011). Another cultural reason behind the choice to not donate organs is because people feel that it interrupts the grieving process (Irving 2011). Sometimes the situations where organs become available are traumatic and sudden for the families of the deceased so it can be overwhelming when they have to promptly decide if they want their loved one's organs to be given away to others in need (Brazeir 2016). This also leads to the issue of people who prefer not to donate because they worry that they will not be able to

have an open casket funeral especially if they donate their corneas (Irving 2011). These are just a few cultural beliefs that lead people to decide against organ donation

Another explanation of why most people do not donate their organs is because of distrust in the healthcare system. One reason for this distrust is because there is still so much to be discovered about brain death (Moraes). There have been times when patients who have been diagnosed as brain dead have miraculously come back to life. This leads some to be hesitant to take their family member and possible organ donor off of life support (Brazeir 2016). Because of this, families also think that there could be hope for a miracle and therefore do not allow for the process of organ harvesting (Moraes). Finally, there is an urban myth that doctors who receive registered organ donor patients in critical condition do not make as much of an effort to resuscitate because of the need for the organs. Because of this families and patients worry that they will not be cared for to the full extent by medical professionals if they become registered as organ donors (Wen 2014).

Lastly, religion plays a large role in the influence of an individual's choice to become an organ donor. There are some people who participate in a religion that specifically forbids organ donation. The reasons behind this usually have to do with the fact that a human's body belongs to God and therefore one must work to maintain its wholeness because the body has to remain relatively intact for burial. This is the same reason why some religions forbid cremation of a body. Another religious belief suggests that by recycling organs, humans are trying to play God, which is considered sinful (Irving 2011).

While cultural mores, distrust in the medical field, and religious beliefs are some of the reasons that people choose not to be an organ donor, there are in fact many more reasons that

should sway people to make the right choice and give the gift of their organs. For instance, a donation holds the power to dramatically change a person's life. It could add years of life to someone who would otherwise suffer a slow and painful death. The deceased no longer need organs so it is wasteful and almost disrespectful to let these healthy organs be buried in the ground instead of being harvested and given to someone who will use them to live on and contribute to society. With an open casket funeral, clothing will cover any physical alterations due to donation, and most organ harvesting will be similar to what would happen in a standard autopsy (Siddique 2017). Additionally, in most cases, brain dead patients are in fact dead leaving only a shell that remains alive through the use of constant machinery. It is an urban myth that patients receive less care when they are organ donors because the doctors who treat them do not know if the patient is a registered organ donor before that information becomes relevant to the situation. Lastly, most religions actually allow for organ donation classifying this as an act of generosity (Moreas). Religious leaders could easily confirm this if they were employed in hospitals to give answers to families with questions (Irving 2011). Though we are making huge strides with genetically modified animal organs that could serve humans in need of a transplant as well as creating organs with a 3D printer, until such a time when these options are viable, everyone must seriously consider registering themselves as organ donors (Siddique 2017).

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