

Although winter is almost here, **Donate Life Month** will be right around the corner... Check out www.donors1.org for updates on all the events planned!

organ & tissue donation & transplantation

Clinical update

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Increasing Donor Designations Eases Discussions

ALISON MOHN FACED the hardest decision of her life when her son Ryan was in an accident in 2004. The one thing that made the situation a little easier was that she was confident in Ryan's decision to be an organ donor.

Donor designation, through state-run registries, now exists in all three states in *Gift of Life's* region, providing transplant coordinators with information about whether a hospital patient has made a donation decision before meeting with a family.

At the onset of a case, as soon as *Gift of Life* is called to evaluate a patient for organ donation, the transplant coordinator

accesses the secured registry, which is available at any hour through a state's Department of Motor Vehicles records. Through that database, he or she can ascertain the status of donor designation.

If the patient is positively designated, that information is shared with the care team at the hospital, and a plan is mobilized to ensure that the donation opportunity is preserved. This information then becomes a component of the initial conversation with the family, as the coordinator explains that their loved one had already made the decision about being a donor. Families are often relieved to hear this and not have to agonize over the decision themselves.



Alison Mohn, donor mother

The transplant coordinator will then explain how the donation process is going to proceed, while providing emotional support to the family. Each donation opportunity is handled with extreme sensitivity, and should the family need additional information about proceeding with a legal gift document, the transplant coordinator will take the time to explain that and work with them to understand their loved one's decision.

For Alison, of Steelton, Pa., she remembers the moment she had the discussion about being an organ donor with her son. He was going to receive his driver's license and talked with her about registering as an organ donor. After a short discussion, he decided to add the designation to his license.

"There was a young transplant recipient who came and spoke to our youth group, and I think that had influenced Ryan's decision," his mom said. "We were even more proud when we found out that after the recipient talked to his youth group, Ryan went back to school and encouraged his classmates to become organ donors."

Little did she know that she would soon need to need to follow through with his wishes just a short time later. And because of his generosity and compassion, six lives were saved through Ryan's gifts.

"There are six people alive today and more than 50 people's lives have been enhanced through Ryan's organ and tissue donation," Alison added. "We are blessed to have met some of these recipients and this has helped us move through our grief. We have never regretted honoring Ryan's decision and know that he lives on through the lives of his recipients."

New Jersey Looks to Save Lives with New Laws



Sen. Richard Codey signs the Hero Act into New Jersey law on July 22, 2008, during a presentation at the St. Barnabas Hospital in Livingston, NJ.

In New Jersey, two crucial pieces of legislation will support donation and transplantation and ultimately help save many more lives.

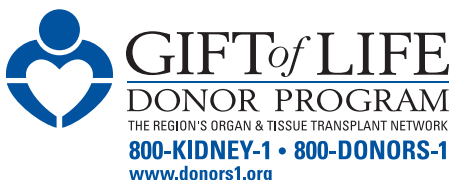
On July 22, Senate President Richard J. Codey, acting as governor in Gov. John Corzine's absence, signed into law the New Jersey Hero Act, a groundbreaking piece of legislation that would help foster a greater understanding of donation while also empowering state residents with the means to say "yes" to organ and tissue donation. Sen. Codey has long been a strong supporter of donation and transplantation.

"For the first time anywhere in the United States, we are mandating education that can and will save lives and make everyone a hero," Sen. Codey said, upon introducing the bill in December 2007.

There are several components to the Hero Act. The educational component of this bill sets into motion the establishment of a standard lesson plan that all high school students will encounter during their tenure. Institutions of higher learning, specifically medical and nursing schools, will also incorporate donation curriculum into their degree programs, making that education a required prerequisite.

Within the next five years, the state will transition into a system where by anyone who must renew a driver's license would be required to either register as a donor, or they must acknowledge the importance of donation and their understanding of who will make the decision on their behalf if they have been silent on the issue of donation.

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CLINICAL SURVEYS Reinforce GLDP Mission to Ensure Best Care

In June, *Gift of Life* began to issue a clinical survey to 256 hospital employees, and of those, 82 have completed the questionnaire to date. The target audience was any member of a care team where the outcome of the referral was either a donation or a family decline. Most respondents were ICU nurses, with physicians comprising the second highest group.

Of the points covered in the online survey, the priorities were getting feedback on *Gift of Life's* practice in the referral process, patient evaluation, family approach and donation discussion, donor management, and organ recovery.

Upon review of the data received, most of the respondents – nearly 92 percent – had very positive things to say about their experience with *Gift of Life's* staff. They commented that coordinators conducted themselves knowledgeably and professionally, while maintaining sensitivity and compassion towards the families.

Most importantly, a resounding majority of survey participants – more than 90 percent – felt adequately informed and prepared for a role in the organ donation process.

The surveys also included quantitative components, where respondents had an opportunity to comment on *Gift of Life* procedure and to comment on areas of interest and education.

Gift of Life's Hospital Services department planned the execution of this survey, and will continue to gather comments. Feedback is critical to the work done by *Gift of Life's* staff, and how we can collaborate with hospital partners and support families and ensure that each family is offered the option of donation in a sensitive and caring manner.

"It is important for *Gift of Life* to have commentary on our performance from the people with whom we work with side-by-side in the organ donation process," said Howard M. Nathan, *Gift of Life* President and CEO. "We want continuously improve our relationships with our healthcare partners and the services we provide to donor families."

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Exemplary Hospitals Awarded Medal for Donation Goals

During the fourth National Learning Congress held in Nashville, Tenn. on October 23-24, 18 hospitals from this region were recognized for excellence in family care and outstanding rates of organ donation. Award winning hospitals were presented with Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Medals of Honor for achieving a conversion rate of 75 percent in a 12-month period.

The following hospitals received the DHHS Medal of Honor:

Abington Memorial Hospital, AtlantiCare Regional Medical Center-City, Christiana Hospital, Geisinger Medical Center, Hahnemann University Hospital, Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Jefferson Hospital for Neuroscience, Lancaster General Hospital, Lehigh Valley Hospital, Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, Reading Hospital, St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, St. Luke's Hospital, St. Mary Medical Center, Temple University Hospital, Wilkes-Barre General Hospital, Williamsport Hospital and Medical Center, and York Hospital.

The work of these institutions is a part of the National Breakthrough Collaborative, established in 2002 in an effort to maximize each and every organ donation opportunity. In 2007, more than 4,000 additional transplants were performed in the U.S. – approximately 28,000 compared with 24,000 that were performed in 2001. This is a credit to the diligence exemplified by the participating hospital partners, and represents unprecedented growth.

New Laws, continued

The final component to the Hero Act begins steps to create an interactive portal within the donor registry, now managed by the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission (MVC). This component will allow residents to be able to add the donor designation online by April 2009, without having to wait until they renew their driver's license.

The Uniform Anatomical Gift Act (UAGA) was the second law brought forward, which further affirms best practices surrounding surrounding organ donation. The NJ UAGA has several provisions. First, it requires that *Gift of Life* be contacted about a potential donor prior to discontinuing any therapies that could compromise the donation option. If a patient may be a potential donor, the organ procurement organization (OPO) is permitted to conduct additional testing necessary to further evaluate medical suitability.

The UAGA also mandates the hierarchy of the next of kin who would make the donation decision. At the top of this list is the agent – a person authorized to act as a healthcare representative by advance directive or someone expressly authorized to make an anatomical decision by any other record – followed by a spouse, then parents, siblings, and others ranked accordingly.

Finally, the law affirms that consent for donation is not necessary from those individuals if the patient designated himself or herself positively as a donor.



Celebrating Abington Memorial Hospital's Medal of Honor, (from l to r) Gift of Life President and CEO Howard M. Nathan, Cathy Spahr, Nurse Manager for the ICU/STU; Elizabeth Medina, Nurse Manager CCU/CSU; Todd Groeber, Nurse Manager for the MICU; and Gweneth George, Gift of Life's Director of Hospital Services.

Catherine Spahr, a nurse manager of the STU-ICU at Abington Memorial Hospital, was able to attend the Learning Congress to receive the award on behalf of her team. Abington is among the hospitals that have received Medals of Honor each of the four years DHHS has been awarding them.

She explained that for her and her peers at Abington, increasing the number of donation opportunities has been a priority.

"It is so important to build a culture in a hospital that supports donation. We want to do whatever it takes to improve the number of patients impacted by donation and transplant," Spahr said. "After that all I am concerned about is making that donation process as smooth as possible for nurses and staff."

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