

The Health Corner: Growing demand makes organ donors urgent need

Written by Submitted by Robin Kent, RN, PA-C, Primary Care Associates of Leonard
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MAY 5, 2011 - With 1.5 million Texans signed up to be organ and tissue donors, and with donations endorsed by everyone from elected officials to businesses to the faith community, folks who need transplants have no cause for concerns about availability -- right?

Not quite, says Michele Goddard of the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). "In a state with 25 million people and a constant medical need for transplants, you never have enough registered donors," Goddard said, noting that 10,400 Texans are on waiting lists for transplants. And despite good overall registration numbers, actual donation rates remain flat in some areas, such as Central and South Texas.

As Goddard's colleague Pamela Mann noted, a lot of things can happen to prevent a person who's signed up for the statewide Glenda Dawson Donate Life Texas Registry from actually having their wishes honored after their death.

"Even if you're in the registry, time is of the essence for harvesting organs after death, and family members who aren't sure about your wishes may not be prepared to authorize it," Mann said. "We urge folks who've signed up with the registry to have the conversation with as many loved ones as possible -- then have it again as often as possible.

"There are a million possible reasons why someone who's signed up to donate might not be able to do so. We don't want a family's lack of information to be one of those."

How to Make Your Wishes Known

The easiest way to indicate your desire to be an organ and tissue donor is to go to the DonateLifeTexas.org website and sign up for the Glenda Dawson Donate Life Texas Registry. The process takes only a minute or so and requires no witnesses. And with Donate Life Month being observed throughout April, there's no better time.

You also can indicate your desire to be on the registry when you apply for, renew or replace

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your state driver's license or I.D. card with the Texas Department of Transportation.

Once you're signed up, tell your friends, family, co-workers and others what you've chosen to do and why. Even though hospitals check when a patient dies to see if they are a registered organ donor, family members who are unaware of the donor's depth of conviction still may refuse to allow organs to be harvested.

In other cases, permission may be withheld because of religious concerns. As Goddard noted, though, most organized religions support organ and tissue donation and consider it an act of charity.

Donation Options

Although a majority of organs are donated posthumously, DSHS notes that more than half of all kidney transplants are from living donors. Live donations of a portion of a liver also are common. The Glenda Dawson Donate Life Texas Registry is not for people who want to be living donors, but you can find out how to be a live donor by contacting the Organ Procurement Organization in your area. They're listed under Resources on the DonateLifeTexas website.

The Glenda Dawson Registry also is not for people who want to donate bone marrow or cord blood, but these vitally needed donations can be made at the National Marrow Donor Program website: www.marrow.org.

To request printed materials on organ and tissue donation, or to find out more about who can donate organs and tissue, go to DonateLifeTexas.org or call DSHS toll-free at 800-222-3986.

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