

HHS Secretary Leavitt Raises Awareness of Organ Donation

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HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt today highlighted National Donate Life Month by calling for greater efforts to educate more Americans on the importance of organ donation.

Secretary Leavitt says the country is reaching record levels of organ donors and organ transplants, but the need for more organ donors remains great. Currently nearly 90,000 Americans are in need of an organ transplant and every 16 minutes, another person joins the waiting list, and thousands more are in need of a tissue transplant.

"There are still too many mothers and daughters, and fathers and sons, who are waiting for their life-saving gift," Secretary Leavitt said. "While we are making record-breaking progress in organ and tissue donation, too many opportunities to donate are missed each year because families are unaware of a loved one's desire to donate or because the family is never asked."

Secretary Leavitt encouraged the public to indicate their desire to be an organ donor by signing the back of their driver's license or filling out an organ donor card. Importantly, people should also talk to their families about their wishes to be an organ donor so that there is no confusion or hesitation should a tragedy strike.

Last year, more Americans gave the gift of life through organ donation than ever before. Thanks to their generosity, more than 27,000 people received a life-saving or life-enhancing organ transplant - a new national record.

HHS is committed to increasing the national donation rate through vibrant and innovative programs. One such program is the Organ Donation Breakthrough Collaborative, which seeks to increase the rate of organ donations in America's largest hospitals from 46 percent to 75percent. This successful program has produced significant results. To date 172 of these hospitals have maintained a 75 percent rate of organ donation.

Other successful HHS programs such as the Workplace Partnership for Life has brought together more than 10,500 companies, associations, and organizations committed to raising awareness of organ, tissue, marrow and blood donation. In addition, programs such as the Model Donor Card includes provisions for designating what organs and tissues may be donated, as well as lines for signatures by two witnesses. To date more than 3 million donor cards have been distributed.

HHS organ donation efforts extend to the young as well. Through the high school and Driver's Education Program, Decision: Donation, the model program for drivers' education classes encourages state and local education systems to use HHS model curriculum. The curriculum has been distributed throughout the nation's high schools.

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