

The Need for Organ Donation

Organ Transplants Transplantation is the removal of a diseased organ and replacement with a healthy organ from a deceased or living donor. The first organ to be successfully transplanted was the kidney in 1954. Livers, hearts and pancreas were first transplanted in the 1960's. By the 1980's lung and intestinal transplants were being performed. Today, many other parts of the body can be used in a transplant, like corneas, heart valves, nerves, bone, skin and cartilage.

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing, more than 352,860 transplants have been performed in the U.S. Every day, about 74 patients receive a transplant. Improved techniques, better selection of patients and development of immunosuppressive medications have increased survival rates for organ transplants. Five-year survival rates for transplant patients range from about 45 percent for liver recipients to 85 percent for kidney recipients.

The Need for Organ Donation Despite the number of transplants, there are still not enough donor organs to fill the needs of those who require them. As of October 19, 2005, more than 89,790 people were on the waiting list for a suitable donor organ. More than 12,700 people wait five or more years to get a matching organ. Experts with Donate Life, a government-sponsored educational organization, estimate 17 people die every day because they are unable to get a donor organ in time.

Raising Awareness Among College Students: An Experiment At the University at Buffalo, SUNY, students in a public relations class were assigned a project to develop a public awareness campaign on organ donation. Using money received from a grant, the students designed campaign materials. Surveys were done before and after the campaign to monitor the effectiveness of the program.

The students found that although their peers had a positive attitude toward organ donation, they lacked knowledge about organ donation basics or how to become a donor. In some cases, students were misinformed by some of the myths surrounding organ donation (like donor organs being sold to the highest bidder or on the black market).

After the awareness campaign, many more students were willing to receive information on organ donation. The campaign designers also found those who were receptive to getting information about organ donation were more likely to talk about the topic to others - including family and loved ones.

The project showed students could develop an effective public awareness campaign with limited resources. Health experts could use the same principles to develop other types of health information awareness campaigns.

For information about organ donation: Donate Life, <http://www.organdonor.gov> United Network for Organ Sharing, <http://www.unos.org>

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