

Local group seeks to educate public on donating organs

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From Friday to Sunday, National Donor Sabbath will be observed nationwide, to educate faith communities and partner with them in the donation of organs, tissues and corneas, so that they, in turn, may educate their members on the importance of this effort.

In doing so, the initiative attempts to discredit myths about donation, and give people considering contributing organs information on the process and how to start.

As a result, The Center for Organ Recovery Education, or CORE, is conducting an ongoing campaign in seeking volunteers to register as organ donors in western Pennsylvania.

According to Lisa Upshur, the Multiculture and Faith-based Community Outreach coordinator, outreach spans across the community, from churches to schools, as well as government/legislative and minority outreach, in an effort to register more donors and to end the wait time for those on the national transplant waiting list.

Outreach efforts include everything from community events to statewide campaigns.

This past summer, CORE held a "Pledge for Life," a film festival that challenged young filmmakers to entertain, inspire and enlighten viewers about the importance of organ, tissue and cornea donation.

This past spring, CORE sponsored the eighth mile of the Dick's Sporting Goods Pittsburgh Marathon, symbolizing the eight lives that can be saved through one organ donor.

There is a continued urgency in the donation of organs. The number of people in need of transplants far exceeds the number of organs, tissues and corneas that are donated.

At this time, more than 120,000 people are awaiting an organ. At least 18 will die each day without receiving one, including two from the CORE area in the western Pennsylvania and West Virginia service area.

More than 8,300 patients are awaiting life-saving organ transplants in Pennsylvania.

In addition, thousands of others could benefit from life-enhancing tissue transplants, and, every 12 minutes, someone is added to the organ transplant list.

Although organ donation through becoming a registered driver in Pennsylvania has become a well known program, only 45 percent of those registered have chosen to become donors.

Many myths have continued to persist, despite campaigns to discredit them regarding organ donation.

Upshur explained 11 of them.

One — If I am in an accident and medical personnel find my donor card, they won't try to save my life. The number one priority is to save every life. All life-saving efforts must be exhausted before tests are performed to confirm the absence of brain or brain stem activity, and a brain death is declared. In addition, for a traditional organ donation, a person must be in a hospital and on a ventilator at the time of death.

Before any transplant decisions are made, CORE discusses the options with the family.

Two — My body will be mutilated and disfigured if I would donate. Donation does not interfere with viewing in an open casket and other funeral arrangements. Donated organs and tissue are removed surgically in the hospital operating room. Doctors maintain dignity and respect for the donor at all times.

Three — Only wealthy people receive transplants.

Financial and celebrity status do not determine who receives a transplant. A national computer network, maintained by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), matches organs according to height, weight and blood type, followed by medical urgency and then time accrued on the waiting list. Most major insurances cover transplants.

Four — I cannot choose what I want to donate.

You may specify what organs or tissues to donate on your donor card.

Five — I am not the right age for donation.

There is no age limit for organ donation. Organs can be donated from someone as young as a newborn. The general age limit for tissue donation is 80. For cornea donation, it is 70.

Six — If I do not sign a donor card, my organs and tissues won't be donated.

If potential donors are not on the organ donor registry, their legally authorized representative (usually a spouse, relative or close friend) is offered the opportunity to authorize the donation.

Seven — My religion does not support donation.

All major religions either consider donations as an individual decision or support or see it as the final act of love and generosity toward others.

Eight — Only heart, liver and kidneys can be donated. Kidneys, liver, heart, lungs, pancreas, intestines and stomach are the organs that can be donated. Corneas, ligaments, tendons, bones and skin are the tissues most often donated. Heart valves and certain arteries also may be donated. Corneas offer the precious gift of sight.

Nine — Organs go to people who didn't take care of theirs. Less than five percent of people awaiting transplant have destroyed their organ through substance abuse and they must achieve and sustain sobriety before they can be listed for transplant.

Ten — My organs aren't of any value because of my medical illnesses. Few illnesses or conditions prevent someone from being a donor. At the time of death, CORE reviews medical and social histories to determine suitability. Poor vision, cataracts and glaucoma do not eliminate someone's ability to donate. The ability to donate is determined on a case-by-case basis at the time of death. Although someone may not be able to donate blood, it does not always prevent the individual from donating organs and tissues.

Eleven — Families can override a donor's wishes. For individuals at least 18 years old, a signed donor card or donor designation on the license are recognized as legally binding.

How does one become an organ donor? One, you can register online in a process that only takes 90 seconds by visiting CORE's website, at donatelife.net/register-now/. Once the organ donor designation is added, you will receive a confirmation card, which must be carried with you until the time of your driver license or identification card renewal. When you visit your state photo license center to get your photo taken for a driver's license or identification (ID) card, you may choose to have the organ donor designation printed on your license or card. Those under the age of 18 are required to have consent from a parent or guardian.

CORE is a Pittsburgh-based organization that oversees a region in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and New York that encompasses 155 hospitals and almost 6 million people.

<http://www.titusvilleherald.com/articles/2013/11/16/news/doc5286fe357e35c700029012.txt>