

Leslie A. Ebert
Legacy Of A Life Scholarship
By: Mia DeJesus

I learned about organ donors at a young age because my dad is a living organ donor and enjoyed telling me the story of when he gave his brother one of his kidneys. My uncle was born with kidney disease and was sick throughout his life, he eventually ended up on dialysis three times a week. After spending a couple of years on dialysis his condition worsened and became a life-or-death situation. My uncle's daughter called my dad crying and begged him to get tested to see if he was a candidate to be a donor.

My dad agreed and was a good fit and so they proceeded forward with the kidney transfer. That took place over twenty years ago and I'm happy to say that both my dad and my uncle are alive and doing well. My uncle likes to tell me that my dad saved his life. He also enjoys telling me with a laugh that his hair was dark brown before the transplant and turned gray shortly after the transplant and blames it on my dad who had prematurely gray hair. My uncle says his gray hair is due to my dad's kidney but says the trade-off was worth it because he got to see his kids grow up, get married, and have their own children.

Most people know a little about organ donations but more education and awareness are needed because there are many misconceptions and inaccuracies about the organ donation process. A national computer system uses strict standards for organ distribution. Organs are matched by blood and tissue typing, organ size, medical urgency, and geographical location. Having a family member be able to donate an organ is the best-case scenario but of course, most organ donations come from a person after they have died.

Organs and tissues that can be donated include: Heart, liver, kidney, lungs, pancreas, and intestines, the skin, bone tissue, heart valves, and blood vessels are transplantable forms of tissue.

More than 42,000 Americans received a life-saving transplant in 2022 but sadly over 100,000, Americans await organ transplants and over 6,000 die annually while waiting. The shortage of donor organs is the most challenging global problem. Although the number of transplants during the last thirty years was 2-fold, the number of patients on the waiting list increased 6-fold.

More awareness of the need to become an organ donor is needed. Research shows that the reason most people are hesitant in becoming organ donors is mistrust of doctors and hospitals, personal pain associated with the procedure as well as fear and belief in a black market for organ sales (illegal in the US). In addition, some people feel that some people in need of organs brought on their illness due to lifestyle choices such as drug and/or alcohol usage and are hesitant to give one of their organs under those circumstances.

The good news is that anyone can donate at any age and the process to become a donor is very easy. If you are under 18, you can sign up to become a living donor or donor after death with the consent of a parent. Those over 18 can choose to become a donor at any time and can sign up at the DMV when getting their driver's license. People of all ages need organs and donations are critical. If you choose to become a donor, you're not just saving one person's life but can save up to eight people's lives with your: heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, kidneys, and intestines. Being an organ donor may make your death more meaningful, especially after an accident or tragic death. By donating your organs, even an untimely death can be meaningful and allows your family some peace in knowing that others live because of you.

By: Mia DeJesus

Chancellor High School

Citations:

Watson, S. (2022, February 13). *Organ donation facts*. WebMD. Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/organ-transplant-donor-information>

United Network for organ sharing: US Organ Transplantation. UNOS. (2023, February 16). Retrieved February 22, 2023, from <https://unos.org/>