



# The gift of life

by Sara Roedel & Emily Fletcher

## Organ donation saves lives

Each day Kim Busboom is able to say thank you for the life-changing gift she received more than six years ago by helping families and friends deal with the tragic death of a loved one. She asks them to consider organ donation.

As a surgical trauma intensive care unit registered nurse at Carle Foundation Hospital in Urbana, Busboom knows first-hand what it is like to be an organ recipient.

Busboom was told that her kidneys were failing because of end stage renal disease.

"My whole world was pulled out from under me ... I was praying for an organ while on dialysis three days a week," Busboom said.

After Busboom received a kidney transplant, she was able to end insulin treatments that had plagued her for years and was ultimately cured of diabetes.

"I know what it is like getting the phone call saying you've been chosen as an organ recipient; it's like someone giving your life back," Busboom said.

She said she is using the gift she was given for the betterment of nursing.

"There isn't a day I come to work that I don't thank God I am able to be here," Busboom said.

### Not enough donors

Becky Ames is a hospital development coordinator for Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network, the federally designated not-for-profit agency that coordinates organ and tissue donation and supports families of donors in the northern three-quarters of Illinois and Northwest Indiana. Ames' territory includes 13 hospitals in and around Champaign County.

From the time of the donor's death, Ames and other staff members set the wheels in motion for a successful organ transplant. Following consent, either from the family or a pre-death decision from the donor, Ames talks to the family, sets up a medical exam with the doctors to check which organs are viable for donation and works with surrounding hospitals to find an appropriate match, she said.

The entire process takes place within 12 to 24 hours.

Ames' goal is to make sure the hospital staff follows appropriate procedures when working with potential donors' families.

"We are very involved with the family from time of death to years after they donate," Ames said.

Every 13 minutes, a man, woman or child's name is added to a national transplant waiting list. Despite the efforts of donors, 18 people die each day while waiting for transplants, and nearly 100,000 Americans are waiting for the transplants that can save their lives.

The need for donors is much greater than the number of donors, and the number of potential donor organs is further reduced by the donor matching process. That said, about 74 organ transplants occur every day.

Nearly 27,000 Americans received an organ transplant in 2004, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. That number has increased every year since 2001.

The Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network maintains a constantly updated list of waiting candidates, transplants conducted and potential donors. The number of donors is equal to about half of the number of transplants performed. The majority of transplant candidates are waiting for a kidney.

"More people need kidneys than any other organs because of the prevalence of kidney failure," Busboom said.

As an organ donor, you have the potential to save lives. Document your decision and tell your family. Sign a donor registration card online or at your local department of motor vehicles and call your next of kin, family members and friends.

"We wait until a family is in a decision-making mode to approach them about organ donation. I explain to the family who (Gift of Hope) is and try to get personally involved with the families," Ames said.

More often than not, a family will decide to donate a loved one's organs when given the choice, Busboom said.

As a trauma nurse, Busboom works directly with patients and family dealing with a tragedy that ultimately leads to the decision of organ donation.

"There are a lot of emotions going on at that time. A lot of times the family is on the fence (concerning donation)," Busboom said.

There is a national organ waiting list, but there is no national registry of organ donors. The best way to ensure you become a donor is to sign your state donor registry, carry a donor card and let your family know your intentions.

"Usually a donor is a very healthy person who suffered a serious trauma, such as a motorcycle accident," Ames said.

Kim McCullough is the manager of public relations and donor family services at Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donation Network.

McCullough said a statewide poll conducted last fall found that while 87 percent of Illinois residents believe registering as a donor is the right thing to do, and more than half identified themselves as donors, most were not aware of the state's new donor registry and the need to re-register if they haven't done so since Jan. 1, 2006, to make sure their wishes are carried out.

"It's been critical for us to explain this and help people re-register, especially since it only takes literally 30 seconds if you do it online," McCullough said.

Once the previously registered 6 million people re-register under the Jan. 1, 2006, guidelines, a 10 percent increase in donations can be projected, resulting in about 100 more life-saving organs available for transplant every year, McCullough said.

### Living donations

Although organ donation typically occurs after death, living donations are growing in popularity. In addition to kidneys, partial liver, lung or pancreas donations are the most common.

Living donations are often more successful, can be scheduled in advance and ensure that the recipient does not have to be put on the national waiting list. These optimal conditions result in higher survival rates.

Although living donors are at a slightly higher risk for high blood pressure and the potential that the remaining portion of their organ may be damaged, their outlook is good. The remaining organs or portions of organs continue to function. The liver can even regenerate and regain full function.

### Cost

Organ transplants are typically expensive, and the organ recipient is responsible for all costs.

"Insurance usually pays for the bulk of the procedure, but even with insurance, they can be very cost-prohibitive for a variety of reasons," said Janice Hill, manager of communication for the National Foundation for Transplants. "Some insurance policies have lifetime caps, caps which may seem generous, but if the recipient has suffered any major illness or trauma in the past, the cap may not be high enough to cover all costs. And then they are stuck footing the bill."

Recipients who do not have insurance must cover costs themselves or seek help from local or national organizations. The National Founda-

*You can donate the following organs or tissues:*

- ✓ Heart
- ✓ Kidney
- ✓ Liver
- ✓ Lung
- ✓ Pancreas
- ✓ Skin
- ✓ Cornea
- ✓ Intestines
- ✓ Bone
- ✓ Bone Marrow

## Don't listen to hearsay

Organ donation myths keep many people from donating.

"When it comes to organ donation, the benefits of giving far outweigh the negatives. There seems to be a lot of negative things said about organ donation. I wish there was more positive information given about organ donation," Busboom said.

**Myth:** Doctors will not exert as much effort to save an organ donor.

**Fact:** The medical team that treats you as a patient is separate from the transplant team. The medical team treats you to the best of their ability until you are declared dead. After death is declared and your family consents to donation, the transplant team is contacted. Your family holds the influence over your medical treatment while you are alive.

**Myth:** Wealthy or famous people get first choice of donated organs.

**Fact:** The national organ waiting list is blind to color, gender, race and wealth. Matches are made based on organ compatibility and the chance of successful transplantation.

**Myth:** The transplanted organ retains some of the personality traits of its original owner and transfers them to the recipient.

**Fact:** Organs such as a kidney, lungs, pancreas, cornea or intestines have nothing to do with individual character traits or idiosyncrasies.

tion for Transplants assists recipients who need financial help for costs not covered by private health insurance or public assistance by holding fundraisers.

According to Hill, almost all recipients need some sort of additional financial assistance to cover the costs not paid by insurance.

Medication following the transplant also can be a financial burden.

"The medication taken after the transplant is just as important as the transplant, and that medication is taken year after year," Hill said. "It can easily cost \$20,000 per year, and due to the costs, some patients have to make a choice between paying their utility bill and taking the medication that will keep them alive."

Each transplant recipient must take anti-rejection medications and other medications to combat the side effects of the anti-rejection medications. These are necessary to ensure the recipient's body does not attack the transplanted organ. Without these medications, most recipients will die just as they would have without the transplant.

Pharmaceutical research has increased the effectiveness and decreased the side effects of these drugs, reducing the average number of medications a transplant recipient requires by half in the last 10 years.

### Considering Donation?

In 2004, the number of people who died waiting for a donated organ fell below 6,000 for the first time in six years. A deceased donor can give several organs to multiple people, which increases the odds of saving a life.

"We give the family the opportunity for the loved one's story to live on through the gift of donation," Ames said. ■

It's Health Insurance So Good, You'll Celebrate

## When was the last time you had a reason to celebrate?

Choose Health Alliance and discover the health plan that gives you access to high-quality medical care and comprehensive health care coverage.

Visit [www.healthalliance.org](http://www.healthalliance.org), call 1-800-851-3379 or talk to your employer to learn more about how you can join the celebration.

**U.S. News & World Report**  
**Best Health Plans 2007**  
**MEGA**

**Health Alliance**  
[www.healthalliance.org](http://www.healthalliance.org)

Your family's  
**health**  
is **not**  
a game.

---

We take care of you  
and your family.

---

Dr. David Jones &  
Staff are here for you.



## Family Practice Medical Center

Office Hours by Appointment  
302 West Hay Street, LL 100, Decatur  
217/872-7337