



Precious Gifts

Donating organs can save lives—now, and in the future.

A story in this issue of *Neurology Now*, “One Precious Gift” (page 24), explores the importance of brain donation after death in helping researchers better understand neurologic conditions. This kind of organ donation is vital in improving the lives of future generations.

But donating other organs is equally important—in helping people with a failing liver, pancreas, kidney, heart, or lung receive a second chance at life right now.

At the time I write this, 115,128 people are awaiting organ transplants. Last year, 28,000 major organ transplantations of all kinds were performed in the United States. Unfortunately, not enough donated organs are available to provide transplantation to all who need it. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, about 79 people receive organ transplants each day, and 18 people die waiting for a transplant.

Since about 2009 (for reasons that are not clear), organ donations from people after death have declined. Fortunately, donations from living donors are increasing. It is possible for a living donor to provide blood, platelets, bone marrow, a kidney, and even part of a liver to help someone else. There is no cost to donors or their families for organ or tissue donation.

Darnell Waun, R.N., M.S.N., is a patient educator for the University Transplant Center at the University Hospital in San Antonio, TX. He also

received a liver transplant, on October 31, 2005. His liver failed because of an autoimmune disease called primary sclerosing cholangitis. This is a rare condition in which the body’s immune system attacks the ducts in the liver.

Darnell served in the Nurse Corps U.S. Air Force for 28 years and received his liver transplant when he was on active duty serving as the Commander of the hospital at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. He says that the worst part about needing an organ transplant is the waiting and uncertainty. “You never know when an organ might become available,” he says. “My wife and I began to wonder what would happen if I didn’t receive a transplant.”

Darnell received a second chance at life when the family of a young woman who died tragically decided to donate her organs to help others. Darnell met the young woman’s family and learned that her brother received a heart transplant. Her family was well aware of the importance of organ transplantation. “Their grief and sadness were eased a bit knowing others would be helped,” he says. In addition to Darnell, five others benefited from the family’s gift.

What can you do if you would like to be an organ donor? Darnell suggests that an open discussion with loved ones about your wishes is a place to start. “When faced with the tragic situation of a loved one’s death, families can find it overwhelming to consider organ donation,” he says. Another of Darnell’s suggestions is to put your wishes about organ donation in your advanced medical directive (living will). “It is an act of love to your family to make this decision—in no uncertain terms—so they don’t have to,” he says.

In the time you read this, someone was probably added to the organ transplant list. To learn more about organ transplantation, the United Network for Organ Sharing website (unos.org) is a great resource. Many states have official websites with more information and the option to sign up on a state-wide Organ Donor Registry.

Are you a living donor? Have you been the recipient of organ donation?

Have you known someone who donated organs after death? Please share your experiences with this act of love and generosity toward others by emailing your story to neurologynow@lwwny.com.

Take good care,

Robin L. Brey, M.D.
Editor-in-Chief



If you would like to be an organ donor, start by discussing your wishes with loved ones.