

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Why is organ, eye and tissue donation so important?**

More than 1,500 Wisconsin families are currently waiting for a life-saving transplant. Thousands more await tissue, bone, skin and corneas. One donor can save or improve the lives of more than 50 people. Donated organs are used to save the lives of people with organ failure. Donated corneas restore vision for the blind. Donated skin, bone and tissue help repair defects, promote faster healing, save limbs and can save the lives of those with severe burns. Heart valves give patients a chance to resume normal life.

### **Will the doctors do everything they can to try and save me if they know my wishes to be a donor?**

Donation is only considered after all efforts to save a patient's life have been exhausted by the medical team. Organ recovery only occurs after death has been declared. The Organ Procurement Organization is a separate team of people from the medical team that is treating the patient. This ensures that there is no conflict of interest.

### **Is organ, eye and tissue donation difficult on the donating family?**

Donation may provide immediate and long-term consolation, especially in light of sudden, unexpected circumstances. The family members of the donor often feel encouraged that something good has come out of something tragic.

### **May I become a donor if I have had cancer?**

It may be possible to be a donor if you have had cancer. At the time of donation, medical professionals will assess your organs and tissues and determine if they are suitable for transplantation. Each donor is evaluated on an individual basis.

### **What is the age limit for organ, eye and tissue donation?**

There are no set age limits for donation, meaning people of any age may become a donor. Advances in technology allow more people than ever to be donors, including older adults and those with previous medical conditions. At the time of death, medical professionals will evaluate whether an individual's organs and tissues can be transplanted. Medical eligibility depends on many factors and must be determined after the donor's death. Every donor is thoroughly screened and tested before donation can take place. This screening includes comprehensive medical and social histories, including high-risk behaviors for transmissible diseases that automatically eliminate any possibility of donation.

### **Is there a difference between tissue and organ donation?**

For organ donation to occur, the patient must be in a hospital on a ventilator and have been declared deceased due to loss of brain or cardiac function. The organs must be quickly recovered, properly preserved and transplanted quickly. Organs must be carefully matched to waiting recipients. Matching is done according to factors such as blood type, medical status of the recipient and size of the waiting recipient. Tissue donation occurs in the first 24 hours after the heart has stopped beating. The tissues can be preserved and used at a later date. Consequently, there are many more potential tissue donors than organ donors. Tissue recipients do not have to be matched to their donors, as rejection is not generally a concern.

### **What is the cost to the donor family?**

There is no cost to the donor family. All costs for recovery of donated organs, eyes and tissues are passed on to transplant recipients and their insurance providers. The donor's family pays only for the medical care provided before death and normal funeral expenses. Organ, tissue and eye donation is a gift. It is illegal in the United States to buy or sell organs or tissues.

### **Will donation affect the appearance of the donor?**

Great care is taken to preserve the donor's appearance through the delicate surgical procedures that occur during organ and tissue recovery. Incisions and areas of tissue donation can be covered by clothing. Open-casket can occur following donation. The recovering agency will make certain the body is released to the funeral home on time. No extra planning is required by families of organ and tissue donors. Through the entire donation process the body is treated with care, respect and dignity.

### **Does my religion allow donation?**

Most major religions in the U.S. support donation as a gift of life to fellow human beings. The vast majority of religious groups support donation as the highest gesture of humanitarianism. Some religions have taken a pro-active stance with a resolution, or adopted a position, that encourages people to seriously consider donation and plan accordingly.

### **How long can organs and tissues survive before being transplanted?**

Thanks to advances in medical technology and improved preservation techniques, organs, tissues and corneas may be transported to reach recipients waiting in transplant centers. Approximate preservation times are:

- Heart/lung: 4 to 6 hours
- Pancreas: 12 to 24 hours
- Liver: 6 to 8 hours
- Kidneys: 24 to 72 hours
- Corneas: Must be transplanted within 5 to 7 days
- Heart valves, skin, bone, tendons, veins: May be preserved from 3 to 5 years

### **Can organs and tissues be donated to someone of a different race or ethnicity?**

Yes. Organ size is critical to matching the donor and recipient for hearts, livers and lungs. But genetic makeup is also important when matching kidneys; therefore, African-Americans will "match" better with a kidney donated from an African-American than any other race—as will Asians with Asians, etc. For an allograft (human to human tissue) transplant, you do not need to have a "match" in order to receive a tissue transplant. For cornea transplantation, the best match is based on size and age of the cornea.

### **How is a potential organ recipient identified?**

The [United Network for Organ Sharing](#) (UNOS) maintains the national computer system listing of donors and candidates for transplant. Recipients are identified through a comprehensive evaluation of medical compatibility, including size and blood type, medical urgency and geographic location. The social or financial positions of the recipient are not factors in determining who is transplanted. Wealthy or famous people do not get priority for organs.

### **Does the donor's family get to meet the recipient?**

A donor's family will be told the age, sex, state and other general characteristics of

recipients. If both the donor family and the recipient agree to sign a release of information form, available through the Organ Procurement Organization, Tissue Bank or Lion's Eye Bank, they may then exchange names, correspond and eventually meet if they so chose.

**Why is it important for me to talk about donation with my family?**

Many people don't like to discuss end-of-life situations; however, talking about donation is different than talking about death. When you share your donation decision with your family, you are talking about the opportunity to help others and to make sure that your family understands your wishes.

**What role do hospitals or health care professionals play in the decision to donate?**

Hospitals must offer families the option of donation and work with them to honor their decision. County Medical Examiners and Coroners also work with tissue and eye banks to provide families with the opportunity of donation.