Organ and Tissue Donation:
Medical Facts, Ethical Challenges, and Jewish Perspectives

Rabbi Charles Sheer
Director, Department of Studies in Jewish Pastoral Care,
College of Pastoral Care
HealthCare Chaplaincy
What we’ll cover in this presentation:

- The NEED for organs and tissue donations
- The PROCESS of organ procurement
- The CHALLENGES that inhibit donation
- JEWISH PERSPECTIVES on organ donation; the “mitzvah” of “pikuah nefesh,” saving a life
Acknowledgement

I wish to thank

- The New York Organ Donor Network for assisting in the development of the format and content of this presentation.

- The Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network for data and statistics.
“Donation is against my religion.”
The Essential Issue
Need for Organ Donation in U.S.

Deceased Donors
Waiting List
Transplants Performed (Dec'd Donors)
The waiting list...as of 1:05 PM on May 5, 2009

- Total candidates: 101,988
  - Liver 15,825
  - Kidney 79,683

Total: 95,508

Source for all data: Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN)
Transplants performed in 2009, January and February

- Transplants performed
  
  **Total:** 4,519
  - Deceased donor: 3,515
  - Living donor: 1,004

- Donors
  
  **Total:** 2,301
  - Deceased donor: 1,298
  - Living Donor: 1,003

- QUESTION: How could there be more transplants than donors?
Organs & Tissues That Can Be Transplanted

- Heart & Heart Valves
- Liver
- Intestines
- Femoral Veins
- Saphenous Veins
- Corneas
- Lungs
- Kidneys
- Pancreas
- Skin
- Bone
- Tendons

© HealthCare Chaplaincy
How the organ procurement system works
ORGAN PROCUREMENT-DONATION PROCESS
NATIONAL ORGAN TRANSPLANT ACT of 1984 (NOTA)

- Single nationwide network (OPTN)

- Private & non-profit under Federal Contract (UNOS)

- Transplant Centers and OPO’S must be members of OPTN to receive Medicare reimbursement

- OPO’S required to be non-profit
Organ Procurement Organization
Service Areas

1. New England Organ Bank
2. LifeChoice OPO and Tissue Bank
3. NJ Organ and Tissue Sharing Network
4. Center for Donation and Transplant
5. Upstate New York Transplant Services
6. New York Organ Donor Network
7. Finger Lakes Donor Recovery Network
8. LifeLink of Puerto Rico
9. Center for Organ Recovery and Education
10. Washington Regional Transplant Consortium
11. Transplant Resource Center of Maryland
12. Gift of Life Donor Program
13. Nevada Donor Network
14. LifeNet
15. Alabama Organ Center
16. The OPO at the University of Florida
17. Life Share of the Carolinas
18. Mississippi Organ Recovery Agency
19. TransLife Florida Hospital
20. LifeLink of Florida
21. LifeLink of Southwest Florida
22. Carolina Donor Services
23. Pacific Northwest Transplant Bank
24. University of Miami OPO
25. Organ Donor Center of Hawaii
26. Mid-South Transplant Foundation
27. LifeLink of Georgia
28. Kentucky Organ Donor Affiliates
29. Tennessee Donor Services
30. SC Organ Procurement Agency
31. Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network
32. Indiana OPO
33. Transplantation Society of Michigan
34. LifeSource Upper Midwest OPO
35. Ohio Valley Life Center
36. LifeBank
37. LifeLine of Ohio Organ Procurement
38. Life Connection of Ohio
39. University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinic
40. Wisconsin Donor Network
41. Arkansas Regional Organ Recovery Agency
42. Louisiana Organ Procurement Agency
43. New Mexico Donor Services
44. Oklahoma Organ Sharing Network
45. Southwest Transplant Alliance
46. Texas Organ Sharing Alliance
47. Life Gift Organ Donation Center
48. Iowa Donor Network
49. Mid-America Transplant Services
50. Midwest Transplant Network
51. Nebraska Organ Retrieval Service
52. Donor Alliance
53. Intermountain Organ Recovery Systems
54. Donor Network of Arizona
55. One Legacy OPO
56. Golden State Transplant Services
57. Life Sharing Community OPO & Tissue Bank
58. California Transplant Donor Network
59. LifeCenter Northwest
What Are the Responsibilities of an Organ Procurement Organization?

- Handle all organ & tissue donor referrals
- Donor evaluation, donor management
- Family counseling, consent process
- Surgical recovery of organs & tissues
- Matching of organs to recipients
- Transportation of organs to transplant centers
- Hospital development & professional education
- Public education
- Donor family aftercare
- Public policy
- Data entry, management, & dissemination
The Obstacles to Organ Procurement and Transplantation
"The pituitary transplant was a complete success, and you will be going home soon. However, I want you to call me at the first sign of a strong desire to swing from the trees and devour bananas."
Finding a Needle in a Haystack:
In the best of circumstances, very few organs are acceptable for transplantation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Organs</th>
<th>Tissues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospital Deaths</td>
<td>56,000</td>
<td>56,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screened-in</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>5,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medically Suitable for Donation</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>3,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donors (year 2008)</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Geographic distance
### HOW LONG CAN AN ORGAN REMAIN Viable ONCE RECOVERED?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organ</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>12 - 18 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lungs</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancreas</td>
<td>8 - 12 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidneys</td>
<td>24 - 48 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intestines</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ORGAN MATCHING CRITERIA

✓ Medical urgency
✓ Tissue match
✓ Blood type
✓ Waiting time on list (for kidneys)
✓ Organ size
✓ Immune status
✓ Geographic distance
✓ Done by national computer list at UNOS
THE MAIN OBSTACLE TO ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION IS, of course,

- The insufficient number of organs donated for transplantation.
One Year, Five Year Graft Survival
AFTER DONATION:
Studies Show That…

- 85 – 98% of families who consented to donation felt it had a positive impact during their time of grief

- All respondents had no regrets regarding their decision to donate

Annual Consent Rates – NY Metro 2003 - 2008

GOAL = 75% CONSENT RATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Consent Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But in actual practice, only 8% of New Yorkers are on the State Donor Registry, compared to:

- 70% in Utah
- 69% in Oklahoma
- 68% in Indiana
- 67% in Arkansas
- 66% in Minnesota
- 65% in Virginia
- 65% in New Mexico
- 61% in Georgia
- 61% in N. Dakota
- 60% in Ohio
Potential Donor Profile Has Changed

IN THE GREATER NY METROPOLITAN REGION:

- Trauma patients are only 22% of organ donors (39% nationally)
- 54% of donors are over 50 (35% nationally)
- 21% of donors are over 65 (10% nationally)
EMOTIONAL and PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Unpleasant to contemplate one’s mortality
- Assumption that it precludes normal funeral (WRONG ASSUMPTION!)
- Confusion about brain death vs. coma or vegetative state
- Distrust of the medical community / poor experience with hospital
- Dramatized stories in the media
- Lack of knowledge
- “I’ve never really thought about this issue.”
For many in the Jewish community, there are other issues.

The statistics are not scientific, but some data suggest that Jews donate far less than other religious groups.
What reasons do Jews give who object to organ donation?

- Judaism requires that the entire body be buried.
- Judaism requires that funeral take place as soon as possible after one’s demise.
- Judaism prohibits others from deriving material benefit from a corpse or part of the remains, or doing anything to it that might be considered a desecration.
- Organ donation is similar to autopsy; just as autopsy is prohibited, so is organ donation.
Some Jews also say

- Brain death – neurological death - is not “real” death
- Only total and irreversible cardio-respiratory failure is death
- Judaism believes in the resurrection of the body
The positions of the Jewish rabbinical movements
Orthodox Jewish positions

In Israel:

- The Israeli Chief Rabbinate has endorsed organ donation and encourages it.

- Other Israeli rabbinic authorities dissent from this position, based upon rejection of brain death criterion.
Rabbinical Council of America

- In the United States, the RCA in 1991 issued a statement as follows:

“The saving of a life takes precedence over all but three imperatives.... Accordingly, no barriers exist to donation of the organs of the deceased....after the patient has been declared dead by a competent neurologist.... In accord with the ruling of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and of the chief rabbinate of Israel, brain stem death, together with other accepted neurological criteria, fully meets the standards of halacha for determining death. Since organs that can be life saving may be donated, the family is urged to do so. When human life can be saved, it must be saved.
RCA continued

- The RCA is reviewing its position on brain death to reflect the opinion of those authorities who do not accept neurological death as death.

- A new statement is anticipated which reflects this controversy.
Conservative Judaism on Organ Donation

- The Rabbinical Assembly Committee on Jewish Law and Standards has ruled that one is obligated to permit post-mortem transplantation of his or her organs in life-saving medical procedures and that withholding consent for such organ donation is contrary to Jewish law.

Reform Judaism

- A responsum was adopted in 1968 affirming the legitimacy of organ transplantation as an act of holiness and “pikuah nefesh” (the saving of a life)
- Reform synagogues annually mark Donor Sabbath and active campaigns encourage members to register as organ donors
“Donation is against my religion.”
“Pikuah Nefesh” – the saving of a life – trumps all other considerations.

Organ donation is one of the strongest religious/moral imperatives – a true “mitzvah.”
For further information about organ/tissue donation

- New York Organ Donor Network
  www.donatelifeny.org

- Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network
  www.optn.org

- Halachic Organ Donor Society
  www.hods.org