A TO Z HEALTH GUIDE

Common Organ Donation and Transplantation Terms

**Anti-Rejection Medications.** Medications that are taken every day for the rest of your life after receiving a transplant. When you get a kidney transplant, your body knows that the new kidney is foreign (that is, not originally part of your body). Your body will attack the new kidney and try to damage or destroy it. The immunosuppressant drugs suppress your body's ability to do this. The goal is to adjust these drugs to prevent rejection and to reduce any side effects of the drugs. Examples include: cyclosporine, tacrolimus, sirolimus, prednisone, mycophenolate mofetil, rapamycin and azathioprine.

**Brain Death.** Brain death is a legal definition of death. It is the complete stopping of all brain function and cannot be reversed. It means that, because of extreme and serious trauma or injury to the brain, the body's blood supply to the brain is blocked, and the brain dies. Brain death is death. It is permanent. Those who are brain dead can be organ donors.

**Cost of Organ and Tissue Donation.** The donor's family and the donor hospital are not responsible for any recovery expenses. The cost will be covered by the transplant center, the recipient's insurance coverage, or in some cases, by the federal government.

**Criteria for Transplant Recipients.** Transplant recipients are selected on the basis of immediate medical need as well as availability of a well-matched organ. Race, sex, or religion are not a part of the consideration.

**Donor Registries.** A confidential electronic database in which individuals can enter and store their wish to be an organ and tissue donor at the time of their death. Many states have donor registries. Registering with one of these agencies confirms your donation wishes.

**Family Discussion.** It's important for families to discuss their feelings about organ and tissue donation. At the time of death, consent is asked.
of the family before donation takes place. Making this decision is easier if every family member's wishes about donation are known to the rest of the family. Studies have shown that donating a loved one's organs and tissues helps in the grieving process by giving some sense of meaning to the loss of a family member or friend.

**Graft Survival.** The length of time an organ functions successfully after being transplanted. “Graft” is another term for “transplanted organ.”

**Laparoscopic Removal of a Kidney.** A type of surgery to remove kidneys from living donors. The kidney is removed through a very small incision, and the recovery time of the donor may be reduced greatly.

**Living Donors.** Living individuals who donate a kidney to someone in need of a transplant. Living donors are often close relatives of the recipient, but may sometimes be a spouse, friend or even someone who is unknown to the recipient (non-directed donor).

**Non-directed Donors.** Someone who donates a kidney to anyone in need of a kidney transplant. Non-directed, or “anonymous”, donors are not related to or known by the recipient.

**Matching.** The process of making sure the blood of a potential donor is compatible with the potential recipient.

**Deceased Donors.** Individuals whose organs and/or tissues are donated at the time of their death. The annual increase in the number of donors has not kept pace with the growing list of patients waiting for life-saving and life-enhancing transplants. Deceased donors are sometimes called cadaveric donors or non-living donors.

**Organ Procurement Organizations (OPOs).** Organizations that recover organs from deceased donors and deliver them to transplant centers where a recipient “match” is located. **Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN).** A national transplant network, established by an act of Congress, which maintains the national computer registry for matching donated organs to patients on the waiting list. The OPTN is administered by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS).

**Religious Views on Organ Donation.** Virtually all religious denominations approve of organ and tissue donation as representing the highest humanitarian ideals and the ultimate charitable act.

**Removal of Donated Organs.** Donor organs and tissues are removed surgically for both deceased and living donors. For deceased donors, there are no outward signs of organ donation and open casket funerals are still possible.

**Required Referral.** All hospitals must have a required referral system in place. This requires the hospital to notify the local organ procurement
organization (OPO) about all deaths. Whenever appropriate, the OPO will offer the deceased person's next-of-kin (family) the opportunity to donate their loved one's organs and/or tissues for transplantation.

**Solid Organ Transplants.** These types of transplants include the following: kidney, liver, intestines, heart, lung and pancreas.

**Stem Cell Transplants.** Transplants that are done by infusing healthy stem cells (cells in the body that can grow into any other cells) into people who have had high-dose chemotherapy for leukemia, immunodeficiency, lymphoma, anemia or metabolic disorders. Healthy stem cells are collected from bone marrow, peripheral blood and umbilical cord blood. Once the healthy stem cells are infused into the patient's blood stream, the cells move from the blood vessels to the center of the bones, where they begin making new blood cells.

**Tissue Typing.** A blood test that is done in a laboratory before a transplant to ensure the donor is a match to the recipient. Each person's tissues, except for identical twins, are different from everyone else's. It is believed that the better the tissue match, the more successful the transplant will be over a longer period of time.

**Transplant Centers.** These are the hospitals that have an established transplant program and perform transplant surgery. Not every hospital does kidney transplants.