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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**RECORD NUMBER OF FAMILIES GIVE GIFT OF HOPE  
THROUGH ORGAN/TISSUE DONATION IN 2002**

ELMHURST, ILL. (FEB. 10, 2003) – A record number of families consenting to organ donation in Illinois and northwest Indiana made possible an unprecedented 17 percent increase in lifesaving organs made available for transplant in 2002, officials with Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network have announced.

Last year, 929 lifesaving organ transplants took place because of the decisions of 289 families to consent to organ donation, Gift of Hope reports. That compares with 792 transplants made possible through 250 donors in 2001. In the region, the previous high number for organ transplants in a year was 861 in 2000.

Gift of Hope President/CEO Jerry Anderson credits the 2002 increases to hospitals' commitment to referring potential donors, as well as increased awareness campaigns and education programs that are encouraging more families to donate upon a loved one's death. Gift of Hope is responsible for discussing donation with families at the hospital when their loved one's death has been declared. The donor network reports that 60 percent of the families its staff worked with in 2002 agreed to donate – remaining above the national average of 50 percent.

Anderson also reported advances in Gift of Hope's medical management of potential donors. "Although the number of potential donors referred to Gift of Hope remained the same in 2002, our recovery teams and clinical staff have improved donor management to enable a greater number of organs to be recovered and transplanted, according to the family's wishes," he said.

In addition to last year's record rate of organ donation, 947 families consented to tissue donation, enabling tens of thousands of patients to receive medical transplants of bone, heart valves and other tissues.

"Illinois is one of the top regions in the nation in terms of the number of donations and transplants that have taken place," Anderson said. "The challenge is to continue building on what has been accomplished. There's still a critical shortage and that means people are dying as a result."

While greater numbers of patients are eligible to donate tissue, in only about 2 percent of deaths are patients medically eligible to become organ donors – thus creating urgency to ensure that the family of every patient eligible to donate is given the option to do so, Anderson said. Gift of Hope relies on referrals from the 185 hospitals it serves to identify those eligible patients and work with Gift of Hope medical teams to coordinate the donation process with the patient's family, hospital staff and transplant teams.

The number of patients registered for organ transplants with Illinois' eight transplant centers remained relatively the same in the last year, at about 4,500 men, women and children. Sadly, as new patients were added to the list, more than 300 patients died while waiting for a lifesaving organ – a heart, lung, liver, kidney, pancreas or small intestine – that never became available.

*(MORE)*

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Nationally, 17 people die every day waiting for lifesaving organ transplants and more than 100 others – one every 13 minutes – are added to the national transplant waiting list. Meanwhile, an estimated one in 20 Americans will require some type of medical tissue transplant during a lifetime; despite the number of transplants performed and the anticipated future need, just 8 percent of the need for transplantable tissue is currently being met.

Organs and tissues from a single donor can help more than 25 individuals. Everyone, no matter how young or old, can be a lifesaver by choosing to be an organ and tissue donor. To become a donor, sign a Uniform Donor Card (such as the card on the back of a driver's license) and, most importantly, inform family members of the decision. In Illinois, a family's consent is required before donation can occur.

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network, formerly the Regional Organ Bank of Illinois, is the federally mandated not-for-profit organ procurement organization (OPO) working with hospitals and families in the northern three-fourths of Illinois and northwest Indiana. Established in 1986, Gift of Hope is among the largest of the nation's 59 OPOs. Its main office is located in Elmhurst, a west suburb of Chicago, with satellite offices in Springfield, Rockford, Peoria, Champaign and Bloomington-Normal.

Working with the 185 hospitals in its service area, Gift of Hope is responsible for:

- Discussing donation with family members of potential donors
- Evaluating potential donors for medical suitability
- Coordinating the organ and tissue procurement processes
- Educating healthcare professionals about the donation process
- Offering support to families of organ and tissue donors
- Providing the more than 11 million people in its service area with information about donation
- Assisting hospitals with the development of policies and procedures for donation

Gift of Hope serves Illinois' eight transplant centers and other OPOs through the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) to provide lifesaving organs for patients awaiting them. UNOS is the federally mandated registration center for organ transplant candidates in the United States. UNOS' computer-based system matches donated organs with patients in need, in accordance with strict federal guidelines intended to ensure equitable distribution.

For more information, contact Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network at 888/307-DON8 or visit [www.giftofhope.org](http://www.giftofhope.org).

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