



660 N. Industrial Drive
Elmhurst, IL 60126

Contact: Kim McCullough, Public Relations
Tel: 630/758-2736
Email: kmccullough@giftofhope.org

630/758-2600
www.giftofhope.org

ORGAN DONATION IN ILLINOIS, NORTHWEST INDIANA REACH RECORD LEVEL AMONG NATION'S HIGHEST

Elmhurst, Ill. (Feb. 2, 2004) – Record levels of organ donation for the second consecutive year mark a new milestone in Illinois and northwest Indiana: For the first time ever in 2003, more than 300 families consented to organ donation, resulting in nearly 1,000 lifesaving organs transplanted.

Only two other organ procurement regions in the United States have ever reached this level of donation in a single year. “This means that what is taking place here in Illinois is truly a model for success in educating the public about donation and saving the lives of patients awaiting organ transplants,” said Jarold Anderson, president/CEO of the Elmhurst-based Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network, in announcing the region’s 2003 donation rates.

In 2003, 972 lifesaving organs were made available for transplant because of the generous decisions of 309 families in Illinois and northwest Indiana to consent to organ donation. That compares with 929 transplants made possible through 289 donors in 2002.

In addition to last year’s record level of organ donation, 870 families consented to tissue donation, enabling tens of thousands of patients to receive medical transplants of bone, heart valves and other tissues.

Donation has remained strong so far in 2004, Anderson said. He credits the region’s increased donation activity to higher levels of identification and referral of potential donors to Gift of Hope from the 185 hospitals in its service area, as well as the support of funeral directors, coroners and medical examiners to ensure that donation remains possible for families who wish to donate.

Numerous donation and transplantation stories in the news in 2003, as well as public awareness campaigns through Gift of Hope and other public and private agencies, have also encouraged greater public support. “We know more people are seeking out information on organ donation through dramatic increases in public education programs and Website traffic,” Anderson said.

“Ultimately, this means more and more of the families we approach about donation have already talked about it and are predisposed to consent to donation when a loved one passes away,” Anderson said.

(MORE)

As the national organ transplant waiting list climbed by nearly 3,000 patients to 83,315 people from January 2003 to January 2004, the number of patients registered for organ transplants with Illinois' eight transplant centers has increased by 70, to 4,419 patients.

Meanwhile, the ongoing shortage of donated organs meant more than 260 patients at Illinois transplant centers died in 2003 while waiting for an organ – a heart, lung, liver, kidney, pancreas or small intestine – that never became available.

Established in 1986, Gift of Hope is the federally mandated not-for-profit organ procurement organization (OPO) dedicated to recovering organs and tissue for patients awaiting transplants in the northern three-quarters of Illinois and northwest Indiana. Working with the 185 hospitals it serves as well as local and national donation and transplant communities, Gift of Hope continually works to develop effective, government-regulated systems to help increase the number of donated organs available for transplant.

Gift of Hope staff work with and educate medical professionals on all aspects of donation, from the appropriate identification and timing for referrals of potential donors to the medical management of donors and the recovery surgery. For families of donors, Gift of Hope provides information on the donation process, placement of organs and tissues recovered and the progress of recipients, as well as follow-up support and programs. Gift of Hope also coordinates programs to educate the 11.3 million people in its service region about organ and tissue donation.

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.

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

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