

Family physicians become first Illinois physician association to launch patient education campaign for organ/tissue donation

Elmhurst, Ill. (Jan. 27, 2004) – The numbers are rising. More than 83,000 people –including more than 4,400 in Illinois – are waiting for lifesaving organ transplants. Even though Illinois' rates of donation and transplantation are among the nation's highest, the state—as well as the rest of the country—continues to experience an organ shortage.

Thus, the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians has launched a year-long patient education campaign about organ and tissue donation – becoming Illinois' first statewide physician association to work to educate patients about donation in the primary-care setting.

IAFP is a 4,800-member professional medical society of physicians in family practice in medicine and surgery. In October 2002, the American Academy of Family Practitioners passed a resolution drafted by IAFP Past President Christine Petty, MD, advocating an active role for family physicians in educating their patients about donation.

“Organ and tissue donation is a part of our mission,” said IAFP President Michael Brummer in announcing the campaign. “As family physicians, our patients trust us to guide them in their health and healthcare decisions, including end-of-life healthcare decisions. Organ and tissue donation is a critical end-of-life decision.”

The Illinois campaign, “It's About Life,” will be a yearlong effort to educate thousands of practitioners and hundreds of thousands of patients about donation. IAFP has issued a call to its member physicians to provide educational materials and family discussion guides in their offices, and encourage patients to have family discussions about organ and tissue donation as an end-of-life healthcare decision.

In addition, IAFP is working with Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network to educate family practitioners about organ and tissue donation through its *Medicine for Today* continuing medical education professional training series.

“There is a role for each of us in saving and improving patients' lives through organ and tissue donation,” Brummer said. “Whether in a private office, an intensive care unit, an emergency room or in the community, there is something we, as healthcare professionals, can do.

“We can educate patients and the public. Everyone should understand organ donation long before they are ever asked to donate a family member's organs. We can make sure that every family has the opportunity to donate—and find something positive in an otherwise painful time by knowing they are helping to save the lives of others.”

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 about the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians, call 630/425-0356 or visit www.iafp.com.

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

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