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2005 sees record number of organ, tissue donations in Illinois and northwest Indiana

ELMHURST, Ill. (Feb. 10, 2006)—The number of organ and tissue donors in Illinois and northwest Indiana reached an all-time high in 2005, saving the lives of more than 900 people in need of organ transplants.

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network announced today that 915 lifesaving organs were provided for transplant through its network, upon the generous decisions of 310 families to consent to organ donation. In addition, 917 families consented to donating a loved one's bone, heart valves and other tissues for medical transplant.

"We are proud to have served so many families, and provide so many transplant recipients a second chance at life through organ donation," Gift of Hope President/CEO Jerry Anderson said. "Any hope that we can offer to patients on the transplant waiting list is through those who decide to donate, and through the many healthcare partners who are instrumental in working with us to serve donors' families, educate the public and increase donation rates," he said.

The shortage of donated organs remains critical in Illinois, with more than 4,500 patients waiting for transplants at Illinois' eight transplant centers. However, Gift of Hope officials are optimistic that organ and tissue donation will increase significantly in 2006, due to several new initiatives at work including Illinois' new "donor consent" registry.

"We think 2006 could be the tipping point for a real breakthrough in donation," Anderson said.

In only a month, more than 100,000 Illinoisans have registered as donors in the state's new "donor consent" registry through the Illinois Secretary of State's office. Under a law that created the new registry as of Jan. 1, Illinois became the 43rd state to honor an individual's documented end-of-life decision to be an organ and tissue donor. Unlike the state's former registry, the new donor consent registry documents a legal decision to donate that does not require additional consent from next-of-kin and can not be overturned by family members at the time of a loved one's death.

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Gift of Hope, which strongly advocated for donor rights through the new Illinois law, projects that honoring donor consent can result in an additional 100 organ transplants each year, once Illinoisans enroll in the new registry. Historically, Anderson said, nearly 20 percent of potential donors enrolled as a 'yes' in state's previous donor registry had their intent overruled by family members at the time of death.

In addition to honoring donor consent, Gift of Hope, hospitals, trauma centers and transplant centers are taking part in the third phase of a national project to increase donation and transplantation rates by identifying and implementing "best practices."

Best practices address immediate identification and rapid referral of potential donors; team approaches to discussing donation options with a family if their loved one is eligible but did not document a decision; and clinical practices upon consent for donation that enable more organs to remain viable for donation and transplant. In addition, several trauma and transplant centers now have full-time donation coordinators from Gift of Hope at their hospitals to work with medical teams and families to make sure all potential opportunities for donation are identified.

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network is proud to serve as the federally designated not-for-profit organ procurement organization that coordinates organ and tissue donation in the northern three-quarters of Illinois and northwest Indiana. Its donation service area includes 11.3 million people and 183 hospitals, including all eight of Illinois' transplant centers – making it one of the nation's busiest for donation and transplantation.

Since its inception in 1986, Gift of Hope has coordinated donations that have saved the lives of more than 10,000 organ transplant recipients, and improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of tissue transplant recipients.

Every organ and tissue donor saves and enhances lives—as many as 25 people or more. There is no cost to becoming an organ and tissue donor, nor is there cost to family members. The donation surgery does not disfigure the body, and all major religions support donation as an act of human compassion. Donors can be nearly any age.

To become an organ and tissue donor in Illinois, register in Illinois' new Life Goes On Donor Registry at any Illinois Secretary of State driver's services facility. It is important to register after Jan. 1, 2006, even if you've signed up as an organ and tissue donor before. Otherwise, the decision is not legally binding and will require additional consent from family members at the time of death.

To learn more about donation and link to register as donor online, visit www.giftofhope.org. Gift of Hope public education staff are also available at 888/307-3668.

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