Organ and Tissue Donation: Preferred Terminology

Language plays an important role in the misconceptions and fears about organ and tissue donation. Avoiding terminology that causes concern among families and the general public not only helps further their understanding, but also improves acceptance of the donation process.

In May 2004, the following terminology was approved by the AOPO Donor Family Council. All Gift of Hope employees should use the following terminology and educate hospitals, funeral service professionals and the general public to do the same.

Use *recover* or *surgical recovery*. Do not use *harvest*.

*Harvest* is a word long used by the medical community. However, the public associates the word with crops, crows, and combines. It can be quite unpalatable, especially to donor families, when associated with their loved one’s organs. The word *recovery* helps people to understand that the removal of a loved one’s organs for transplant is a respectable surgical procedure.

Use *deceased donor* or *deceased donation*. Do not use *cadaver* or *cadaveric*.

In the past, the term *donor* did not require any specificity. Today, as more people choose to become living donors, there is a need to distinguish between living and *deceased* donors. The term *cadaveric* depersonalizes the gift offered upon an individual’s death. Webster defines cadaver as “dead bodies intended for dissection.” This is not a positive message to convey to the public or donor families.

Use *mechanical support* or *ventilated support*. Do not use *life support*.

There are two ways to determine death: by cardiac death criteria (when the heart stops functioning) and brain death criteria (when the brain stops functioning). The term *life support* is confusing when used in conjunction with brain death. When death occurs, there is no support that can make the individual live again. After brain death, an individual may share the gift of life with others through organ donation. The organs are perfused with oxygen for several hours through *mechanical support*. *Mechanical* or *ventilated support* are appropriate terms for the support given a deceased person in the event of organ donation.

Use *organ donation after cardiac death*. Do not use non-*heartbeating donation* or *asystolic donation*.

Use *donation after brain death* or *brain-dead donor*. Do not use *systolic donation* or *systolic donor*.

Use *deteriorating to brain death* instead of *progressing to brain death*.

Use *recovering a donor* instead of *doing a donor*. 