Variations in time frames inherent to successful organ donation process

To meet patient, family and transplant recipient needs during donation, Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network adheres to a strict set of protocols and policies. However, the uniqueness of each donation situation, like any medical situation, encompasses multiple factors that impact the length of the process.

Patient referral, evaluation and consent for donation generally take place over several hours, hinging on the timing of the referral call and the patient's condition. The time frame encompassing donor management, organ allocation and organ recovery can range from 12 hours to 36 hours. The goal is to maximize organ viability and ensure optimal matching with waiting recipients.

Donor management and evaluation
Following consent for donation, the donor remains on a ventilator and is supported with fluids and medications to keep oxygen and blood circulating to the organs. These care protocols can make possible the recovery of organs that were initially assessed as medically unsuitable, and increase the number of organs that can be procured and transplanted with favorable outcomes. Hospital staff continue bedside care of the organ donor patient in collaboration with Gift of Hope clinical staff, including ventilator and medication orders and laboratory/diagnostic testing. During this donor management stage, many factors impact timing of the process: the number and type of organs consented to for donation, the types of tests required to determine organ viability, the availability of hospital specialists to perform these tests, and whether repeat testing is needed. These factors subsequently impact time necessary for organ allocation.

Matching recipients
Organ allocation also depends on the donor's blood type, height and weight, and how quickly they can be matched with patients awaiting transplant. Each patient waiting for an organ is placed on a national computerized list maintained by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS). Upon receiving donor information from Gift of Hope, UNOS generates a list of patients who match for the particular organs donated. The Gift of Hope Placement Coordinator accesses the list and sends electronic notifications to multiple transplant centers about an organ offer(s) for particular candidates listed at their centers. Designated personnel at each transplant center evaluate the donor information and either accept the offer pending further information or decline the offer. The Placement Coordinator continues with offers on each consented organ until the organ is accepted or the list is exhausted.

Organ recovery
After all organs are placed for transplant, the Organ Recovery Coordinator works with hospital staff and the incoming transplant teams to schedule an operating room for organ recovery at the donor's hospital. Sometimes the OR recovery time is delayed if the hospital reschedules the OR to accommodate incoming surgical emergencies. In these cases, we keep all parties informed of timing changes. The Organ Recovery Coordinator oversees the entire process in the OR, working in conjunction with the transplant surgeons and the hospital OR staff.

Each donation situation carries its own set of complexities. We appreciate your patience and collaboration during the process of saving more lives.