

Chicago Tribune

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2007

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Organ transplants rely on donations

This is in response to "Should age determine who gets a kidney transplant? Controversial proposal would put younger patients higher on waiting list" (Page 1, Feb. 9). While the present organ-matching system has done a great deal of good for many people, the United Network of Organ Sharing continues exploring every opportunity to ensure scarce donated organs are allocated efficiently and effectively to benefit as many people as possible. The lifetime survival benefit, as described in this article, is one new concept under study; UNOS has yet to decide whether and how it should factor into future organ allocation policy.

Amid national discussion of this concept, I urge your readers to remember a critical point: The only true solution to the organ shortage is to have enough organs available to meet the need. Increased donation equates to increased transplants and decreased wait times.

To provide kidneys and other organs to those await-

ing transplant, do the obvious: Take a moment and register as an organ donor.

If you live in Illinois and believe you already are a registered organ/tissue donor, chances are you're wrong. A relatively new state law established a new donor registry through the office of Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White that requires anyone who registered before Jan. 1, 2006, to reregister to ensure his or her wishes to donate are honored. All you have to do is visit www.IAmAreYou.org and take literally just 30 seconds to register.

We recently conducted a statewide poll in which 90 percent of Illinoisans agreed that signing up for organ donation was "the right thing to do," but only 40 percent had actually registered.

Fewer still were aware of the new registry and the need to reregister.

In response to the poll and the growing transplant list—now nearly 4,700 patients at Illinois' eight transplant centers—we are part of a coalition of Illinois agencies

working to increase donations and decrease wait-list times as quickly as possible. As Donate Life Illinois, we have launched a campaign to register 3.5 million Illinoisans in the next year and a half in our mission to help save more lives.

Due to the growing medical need and number of patients who can benefit by transplantation, there will always be an organ waiting list. With regard to kidney allocation, UNOS will eventually make a decision after public input regarding how best to approach lifetime survival benefit.

But in the meantime, every reader has the opportunity right now to do something to help solve the problem. Take the next 30 seconds and give others a second chance at life. It could be the most important moment of your day—and someday, someone else's life.

*Jarold A. Anderson
President/CEO
Gift of Hope Organ
& Tissue Donor Network
Elmhurst*