

Moline Daily Dispatch

January 13, 2007

Illinois organ donors need to add name to new registry

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www.IAmAreYou.org

A statewide poll showing a large gap between support for donation and actual donor registrations has launched a new campaign this week to remind organ donors in Illinois to register under the state's new potential donor list.

Nearly 90 percent of Illinois adults in the poll said "registering to be an organ donor is the right thing to do"; however, 40 percent reported they have not registered to be an organ donor. In addition, of adults who identify themselves as registered donors, nearly half are unaware of a new Illinois donor registry.

Last year, Illinois established a new registry for organ donation. The registry is managed by the

Illinois Secretary of State's office and is a confidential computerized database that documents a person's consent to be a donor. A state law makes the registration and the donor's decision legally binding, not requiring additional witnesses or family consent, although donation agencies will keep family members informed.

The new registry has about 1.5 million donors, said Kim McCullough, spokeswoman for Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network, and the Donate Life Illinois campaign.

"That is pretty significant. It certainly is one of the nation's fastest growing new registries, which is fantastic," she said.

About 6 million people were on the old registry.

"That's what made these poll findings so interesting," Ms. McCullough. "There's still a lot of education to put out there to people about the need to reregister."

The old registry still exists, but organ donation agencies are hoping donors will re-register so their decision is legally binding.

When there is a death at a hospital, the staff contacts Gift of Hope to evaluate the patient for a potential donation. They first check the new, first-person registry. If the patient is not registered there, they check the intent

registry so when they talk to the family they can let them know the patient's wishes, Ms. McCullough said.

The poll results and the growing waiting list for transplants — now up to 4,700 patients in Illinois — spurred a coalition of agencies involved with organ, tissue and eye donation to launch "Donate Life Illinois." It is an 18-month campaign to register 3.5 million people in the state's new registry.

"The poll reinforced what we've observed for years in educating the public about donation," said David Bosch, Donate Life America president and communications director for Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network. He also leads the Illinois campaign. "It suggests that

a lot of people are willing to donate life provided we can tell them about the new registry, explain it takes just 20 seconds to register and make it easy to register now — you don't have to wait until the next time you go to the (Department of Motor Vehicles)."

The campaign has launched a new Web site, www.IAmAreYou.org and a blog where people can discuss organ donation and ask questions, Ms. McCullough said. A MySpace page also has been set up for the campaign.

"There are a lot of young people on MySpace who are very open to wanting to donate and help spread the word," she said.

In March the agencies in the coalition will begin training volunteers on how to make donor-

registration stations at public places.

"In every community there are so many opportunities, whether it's the local library, or the Rotary Club, to set up a booth where people can come have their questions answered and then register in the new registry," Ms. McCullough said.

A workplace campaign also will begin this year to encourage businesses to set up donor-registration drives as they do with blood drives.

Donate Life Illinois also is partnering with six colleges to do donor outreach on their campuses.

Ms. McCullough said she encourages anyone with questions about organ donation or the registry to visit the Web site.