

ILLINOIS

Organ donor law changes beginning to have effect

DEAN OLSEN

033

Copley News Service

SPRINGFIELD — The day after her husband fell off his motorcycle and suffered a severe head injury, Dee Paquette struggled with her feelings about organ donation.

When the issue was raised at Peoria's OSF Saint Francis Medical Center, where she and other family members gathered in the hours after the accident in November, emotions swirled in

'I actually didn't want to go through with it.'

Dee Paquette, whose husband was pronounced brain-dead after a motorcycle accident in Morris

her mind as her husband lay unconscious in a nearby hospital bed.

"I actually didn't want to go

through with it," she said.

She worried that Arthur Paquette, 54, would feel pain when the organ was taken, even though doctors told her that the accident on a two-lane road in Morris had left her husband — who wasn't wearing a helmet — brain-dead.

Dee Paquette, 46, said she is not opposed to organ donation, but the thought of surgery to remove his organs repulsed her.

Those types of concerns in the past have led Illinois families to

say no to donation 40 percent of the time, even though national surveys indicate that more than 90 percent of Americans support the concept of organ donation.

In Arthur Paquette's case, his family couldn't have stopped organ donation from taking place, even though his wife, four adult children and three siblings ended up supporting the idea when they gathered at Saint Francis.

See **DONOR**, page A6

DONOR

② 033

Continued from Page A1

A few months before the accident, Arthur Paquette, who lived in Tinley Park, had obtained a license to ride a motorcycle. At the same time, he signed up for Illinois' new "first-person consent" registry for organ donation.

The registry, established in January 2006 by the Illinois General Assembly, allows drivers to make binding decisions to allow for organ donation upon their death.

There is anecdotal evidence that the law has led to organ donations that in the past might not have taken place.

But the law hasn't yet shown an effect on the overall number of organ donors, which hovers around 300 statewide each year. That's because it will take between four and eight years for the 6 million drivers in the previous organ-donor registry to be transferred to the new "first-person consent" registry as they renew their driver's licenses, according to Dave Bosch, spokesman for the Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Donor Network.

So far, 1.5 million drivers have signed up for the new registry — mostly at secretary of state driver facilities, though they also can sign up online at www.lifegoeson.com. Gift of Hope plans to kick off a major sign-up campaign this month that includes a special Web site, www.IAmAreYou.org.

"We have a long way to go before we can compare apples to apples," Bosch said.

The first-person consent law replaced a system in which Illinois drivers could indicate in a state-operated registry that they wanted to donate. They also could sign the back of their drivers' licenses outlining their wishes. But those wishes could be ignored.

Before the law changed, families refused to give consent 16 percent of the time, even after being told their loved ones had signed up for the registry, according to Elmhurst-based Gift of Hope.

...has found...
...with first-person consent
registry to address the chronic
shortage of donated organs
nationwide.

In Illinois, 4,600 people are on waiting lists for organ transplants through hospitals that include Memorial Medical Center in Springfield and St. Francis in Peoria. The other transplant centers are at Loyola University Medical Center in Maywood and several Chicago hospitals: Children's Memorial, Northwestern Memorial, University of Chicago, University of Illinois and Rush University Medical Center.

Between 200 and 300 Illinoisans die each year on the waiting lists.

Officials from Gift of Hope have estimated that first-person consent could lead to at least 30

more organ donors each year — a 10 percent increase, when the new registry is filled.

Because several organs can be procured from each donor, the new law could lead to 100 more donor organs becoming available for transplants each year, Gift of Hope officials said. The agency works with hospitals and families to procure organs from the 1 percent to 2 percent of people who die in ways that make organ donation an option.

Jack Lynch, Gift of Hope's director of community affairs, said first-person consent has "without a doubt" made more organs available for transplant.

...could be kept... at least 10

...deceased organ donors in
... — all of them black — who
... hadn't become donors if
... hadn't signed up for the
first-person consent registry.

Lynch, who is black, said he

discussed organ donation with those donors' families and believes the families would have canceled the donations if they had had the final say.