

Take a second now to give others a second chance

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Registering to be an organ/tissue donor is the right thing to do.

Do you agree? Chances are you do. According to a recent statewide poll, 87 percent of Illinoisans agree that donation is the right thing.

But have you taken the critical 30 seconds to do something about it?

What you may not realize is that Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White established a new registry more than a year ago. Unlike before, the new registry ensures your decision to donate will be carried out without the need for additional consent from others.

If you're among the millions of Illinoisans who registered as a donor before Jan. 1, 2006: Put down this article, go to your computer, and take 30 seconds to reregister online today.

Reregistering is not an extra step. It's necessary to ensuring a second chance for the people whose lives you may save some day.

Why the urgency?

We recently polled Illinois residents about their attitudes about donation and awareness of the state's new registry. The poll found that two-thirds of those who consider themselves donors have not reregistered. And if you haven't reregistered, your family or another legal authority must give additional consent at the time of your death before you can become a donor.

In other words, your wishes to donate may or may not be honored.

Meanwhile, the need for donors continues climbing alongside dramatically increasing rates of hypertension, diabetes and other medical conditions that lead to end-stage organ failure - and the need for transplantation.

Modern transplantation is a viable medical option for more of those patients than ever before. The shortage of donated organs to transplant them remains a problem. But it is one of the few healthcare problems we have the ability to solve - through increased donation.

Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network is the federally designated not-for-profit agency that coordinates the donation process with hospitals and families in the northern three-quarters of Illinois and northwest Indiana.

When a patient has died and there is an opportunity for donation, family members asked to provide consent may say “no” primarily because they don’t know their loved ones’ wishes, or they don’t want to make the decision on their loved one’s behalf. Most often, they simply are too emotionally exhausted to make the decision.

In the past, nearly 20 percent of registered donors had their wishes overturned by family members for just these reasons. The result is that approximately 100 more lifesaving organ transplants could have taken place each year, but did not.

At the same time, about 250 Illinoisans die each year while waiting for donated organs to become available.

Today, more than 4,600 Illinoisans are waiting for organ transplants at Memorial Medical Center here in Springfield, OSF Saint Francis Medical Center in Peoria and the state’s six other transplant hospitals.

At hospitals and clinics throughout our region, thousands more patients are in need of donated tissue for heart valve replacement, corneal transplant, spinal fusion and bone grafts, skin grafts and other medical procedures.

Increasing donation to help all of these people as well as honor the decisions of those who decide to donate are why Illinois joined more than 40 other states in passing a “first person consent” law for organ/tissue donation, which created the new registry.

The sooner that all Illinoisans join the new registry, the sooner more registered donors’ decisions are honored - and more lives are saved.

I encourage you to hear and see for yourself the impact your donor registration can make. Go to www.IAmAreyou.org, the official Donate Life Illinois campaign Web site for our effort to register 3.5 million Illinoisans in the state’s new registry.

It’s also where you can take those 30 seconds to reregister in the Illinois secretary of state’s new donor registry, and forward a message to others to do the same.

Keep in mind that virtually anyone can become a donor and your medical eligibility is confirmed at the time of your passing. There is no cost associated with donation to you or your family, and all major religions support donation as one of the greatest acts of human compassion.

Do not let one or two unanswered questions about the donation process stop you from registering as an organ/tissue donor. It’s all about giving others a chance to live. The next 30 seconds is your chance to make that difference. Please take it.

David Bosch, communications director of Gift of Hope Organ & Tissue Donor Network, is president of Donate Life America and chairs Donate Life Illinois, a campaign to encourage 3.5 million Illinoisans to register as organ/tissue donors by April 2008.