



EQUAL HEALTH:

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A GIFT OF LIFE

The rate of organ donation in African American, Hispanic, Asian and Native American communities does not keep pace with the number needing organ transplants.

Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences
Center for Health Disparities Research & Education
Community Outreach & Information Dissemination Core

Centers of EXcellence in Partnerships for Community Outreach, Research on Health Disparities, and Training program (Project EXPORT)

Organ Donations

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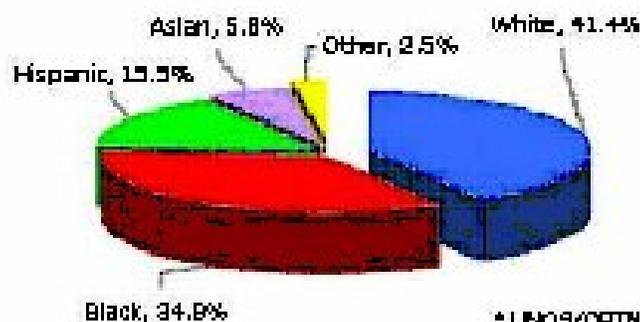
What is an organ donation?

An organ donation is the voluntary act of allowing the legal removal of one or more healthy organs from a person for use as an organ transplant in one or more persons who would not be able to survive otherwise.

Organ donations in Blacks, Hispanics and Whites

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), there are more than 83,000 persons on the national transplant waiting list. Approximately 50% of all patients waiting for a life saving transplant are persons from a racial or ethnic minority: Approximately 23,824 are African Americans, 13,441 are Hispanics, 5,446 Asians or Pacific Islanders and another 683 are from other racial or ethnic minority groups. Each day approximately 16 persons die while waiting for a life saving organ transplant. Every 16 minutes, a the name of a additional person in need of an organ transplant is added to the national waiting list.

More Than Half of the Kidney Transplant Waiting List Is Formed by Racial and Ethnic Minorities *



* UNOS/OPTN
Data as of April 4, 2003.

Organ donations from Blacks and Hispanics are needed

More African Americans and Hispanics are waiting to receive organ transplants than registered as organ donors. African Americans and Hispanics do donate in proportion to their share of the population. African Americans, for example, are about 13 percent of the population, about 12 percent of donors, but represent about 35 percent of persons in the kidney waiting list. The reason for the higher demand for transplants among African Americans and Hispanics is that the number of persons with diabetes, hypertension and advanced kidney failure among these groups and their higher risk to more severe disease, faster progression and complications is much greater than non-Hispanic Whites.

Race and ethnicity of organ donors important

The race and ethnicity of organ donors is important because organs from a donor must match the recipient in terms of similar inherited characteristics. In general, people from the same racial and ethnic groups are more genetically similar among themselves than to people of other races. It is usually easier and faster to match organ donors and potential recipients when they are members of the same ethnic background, this is not an absolute requirement. If more Blacks and Hispanics become organ donors, it will be easier and faster to match their organs to Blacks and Hispanics waiting for an organ transplant. The Organ Procurement and

Transplantation Network (OPTN) developed policies that allow up to 5% of organ recipients at a transplant center to be from other countries. From 1995 to 2002, non-resident aliens accounted for only about one per cent of more than 20,000 transplants performed annually.

Serious problems related to organ donation

The highest need for organ donations among Blacks and Hispanics in the United States is for kidney, liver, heart and a combination of kidney and pancreas. On March 31, 2006, there were 25,102 Black and 14,444 Hispanic candidates for organ transplants in the U.S. Of these, more than 90 percent of Blacks and more than 75 percent of Hispanics were waiting for a matched kidney donor.

Some facts about organ donation

- Organ donations are managed by special organizations called organ procurement organizations. A representative of one of these organizations usually approaches the patient's family for consent even if there is a signed donor card.

- The order of priority for giving permission for removing the organs of an organ donor is as follows:
 - the husband or wife
 - an adult son or daughter
 - either parent
 - an adult brother or sister
 - a grandparent
 - a legal guardian

- When consent for an organ donation is given, the recovery coordinator or hospital staff will obtain written consent. Occasionally, a recovery coordinator will obtain consent for tissue donation over the telephone. A copy of this consent form becomes part of the donor's permanent hospital record.

- Most organ donations are obtained from people with severe head injury resulting in brain death after careful medical examination.

- There are two ways to pronounce death. Death may be pronounced when a person's heart stops beating or when the person's brain stops functioning (brain death).

- When the brain dies it permanently stops working even when the heart continues beating and the person breaths with the help of special machines. These may be persons who have had a stroke, severe head injury in a car accident or fall, or a brain tumor that has not spread to other organs.
- Brain death occurs when blood and oxygen cannot flow to the brain. Though, the person's heart continues to beat and it provides blood and oxygen to the rest of the body, as long as the person remains on a breathing machine, brain dead people can qualify as organ donors.
- The law gives information on who can give permission for donation of the organs of a dead person if that a person did not make a decision about being an organ donor.

Tips to become an organ donor

1. In the U.S. anyone older than 18 years old has the right to donate organs for transplantation. This right is provided by a law called the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act (UAGA). A form of this law is recognized in all states.
2. To make your wish to be an organ donor official, all you need to do is to sign an organ donor card **or** indicate that you wish to be an organ donor on your driver's license. Some state laws provide other ways to become a donor.

3. Make sure to tell your family of your wish to have your organs donated. This is important because your family will be approached before the donation is carried out and your wishes may not be respected.

To find more information about organ donations

1. National minority organ tissue transplant education program.
Web site address:
<http://www.nationalmottep.org/>
2. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Healthcare Systems Bureau (HSB), Division of Transplantation, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
Web site address:
<http://www.organdonor.gov/about.html>
3. National Kidney Foundation
Web site address:
<http://www.kidney.org/transplantation/>
4. The organ procurement and tissue transplantation network (OPTN) provides information about organ donors and persons waiting to receive organ transplants.
Web site address:
<http://optn.org/data/>

Mission of the Center

The Uniformed Services University Center for Health Disparities Research and Education (USUCHD) aims to promote health-related change and ultimately reduce health disparities among racial and ethnic minorities through research, education, training, and community outreach and information dissemination.

Community Outreach and Information Dissemination Core

The core's general objective is to actively involve community partners in research, training opportunities, and educational offerings to maximize the understanding and reduction of health disparities in minority populations. This broad objective is achieved through multiple activities, including the extraction, synthesis and compilation of relevant materials and information from the other primary EXPORT Center Components. The activities respond to specific operational objectives established each year in response to the accumulated experience of the community outreach team, the health concerns and needs of our community partners and the Community Based Organization with whom we work collaboratively to reduce health disparities among racial and ethnic minorities.

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