



Jesse White: Cleaning up organ donation misconceptions

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April is National Donate Life! Month, a time aimed at encouraging Illinoisans to join the state's organ and tissue donor registry. As the secretary of state, I manage Illinois' organ and tissue program. This month my office and other organizations will be working together to promote organ and tissue donor awareness. Television and radio ads will air throughout the month of April statewide encouraging people to become an organ/tissue donor.

Our message has made its way across Illinois as more than 6 million people have registered to become organ and tissue donors. Every day, 18 people die nationwide waiting for transplants. Nearly 100,000 people are still waiting for transplants. Every day, 12 people are added to the list.

Many people don't register because they are afraid of misconceptions about organ and tissue donation. Many movies and television shows are quite informative regarding the truth and benefit of donation, but others have provided incorrect and often frightening information discouraging people from registering for this vital program.

This column is meant to dispel some of the misinformation in regard to organ and tissue donation. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions about organ and tissue donation:

Can people sell their own organs?

No. The National Organ Transplant Act makes it illegal to sell human organs and tissue in the United States. Reputable organ transplantation takes place only at authorized transplantation centers after a donor's family has been consulted. There is no cost to the donor's family.

Do the rich or famous move up faster on the waiting list?

No. A national computer system and strict federal, regional and local systems are in place to ensure ethical and equitable distribution of organs. Organs are allocated based on the recipient's blood type, body size, medical urgency, length of time on the waiting list and proximity to transplant center.

Isn't organ and tissue donation against my religion?

Some people mistakenly think their church or synagogue doesn't support organ/tissue donation. In fact, almost all major western and eastern religions support organ/tissue donation.

Will doctors take a person's organs before they are dead?

Organ donors are not in a coma. They are legally brain dead and ready to be removed from an artificial ventilator. A doctor will continue to try to save the patient until all efforts have failed. Organ and tissue donation occurs after the person is pronounced dead.

Remember, one person's decision to donate could provide life or improve the quality of life for 25 people or more. One day it may be you or a family member who is in need of an organ or tissue transplant to save his or her life.

Illinoisans can register by calling the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program at (800) 210-2106, by visiting www.LifeGoesOn.com, or while obtaining or renewing an Illinois driver's license or state identification card at any state driver's license facility.

Jesse White is the Illinois secretary of state.