Transplant pioneer dies

Dr. Joseph E. Murray, a pioneer in the field of transplantation and a Nobel Prize-winning physician, recently died at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, the same hospital where he performed the first kidney transplant on Dec. 23, 1954. He was 93.

Murray’s pioneering transplant procedure — removing a healthy kidney from a 23-year-old living donor and giving it to his identical twin brother who was suffering from kidney failure — was a groundbreaking surgery at the time.

Dr. Murray was the director of the Surgical Research Library at Harvard Medical School and Brigham. He continued to perform transplants on twin patients before branching out to non-related patients and deceased donors years later. He also advanced the field of cosmetic surgery, tissue/skin transplantations and reconstruction, which he learned from his years in the U.S. Army.

Despite many physicians telling him to abandon transplantation as an unorthodox folly, he continued transplanting kidneys in dogs until he had perfected the procedure and agreed to perform the surgery on the twin brothers in 1954. In his book, Dr. Murray later wrote, “There was a collective hush in the operating room” as the new kidney began to work immediately. The rest, as they say, is transplantation history!


Customer Service Week celebrated at facilities

Many facilities throughout Illinois celebrated Secretary of State Customer Service Week in early October. It was a time for facility staff to thank customers for their business throughout the year. Some facilities offered themed days such as “Crazy Hat Day,” “Donor Designation Day,” or days where all employees wore their “Donate Life” blue polo shirts. Facilities were judged on creativity and enthusiasm. Following are the winners of this year’s Customer Service Week. Congratulations to everyone who participated!

**Workplaces with 12 or fewer employees:**
- **First place** — Tie between Piano and Wheaton Express facilities
- **Second Place** — Greenville and Watseka facilities

**Workplaces with 13 or more employees:**
- **First Place** — Woodstock facility
- **Second Place** — Chicago West facility
- **Third Place** — Tie between Business Services Chicago Office and Waukegan facility

As we usher in the New Year, I want to applaud our accomplishments and milestones of 2013. At the top of the list is the 20th anniversary of Illinois’ donor registry. Since its inception in October 1992, the office has built a strong and visible Organ/Tissue Donor Program with the help of dedicated staff, volunteers and partners in the donor community. At the end of 2012, the donor registry now has more than 5 million potential donors.

This fall the Donor Program received two awards from the AAMVA for marketing campaigns: one for an article in the Life Goes On newsletter and another for our counter mat displays in facilities. Accolades go out to all those involved in producing these creative outlets to promote donor awareness.

Throughout the year staff also participated in multiple health fair opportunities and our community college program has been a huge success.

On a sad note, our very dear friend and Donor Program employee Violet Taliaferro passed away this month. Violet has been a valiant champion for those awaiting transplants and never lost her will to fight this battle with kidney disease. She will be missed greatly by everyone who had the pleasure of knowing and working with this remarkable woman.

Plans are underway to make 2013 our best year yet for spreading the word about donation. I look forward to working with staff, volunteers and donor advocates to ensure that more people on the waiting list receive the gift of life.

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Donor Program welcomes new manager, assistant manager

The Organ/Tissue Donor Program is pleased to welcome Connie Boatman as its new program manager. She replaces former manager Nadine O’Leary.

“Over the past 10 years, Nadine has steered the Organ/Tissue Donor Program to the success it is today,” said Secretary of State Jesse White. “Our community outreach has improved, registry numbers have increased and awareness about the program is at an all-time high. We owe this in part to Nadine’s stalwart leadership and commitment to the program. We wish her the very best in her new professional endeavors.”

Connie comes to the Donor Program from the Vehicle Services Department. She holds a B.A. in health administration, and her professional experience spans more than 20 years in the fields of marketing and sales, event planning, managerial administration, and training and development.

Connie has had several family members and loved ones benefit from donation. She intends to maintain the integrity of the program by sustaining its relationship with Donate Life partners, expanding education efforts and further strengthening the donor registry.

Sitha Hun has been named assistant program manager. Sitha has been with the Donor Program 12 years, and his new duties include fiscal responsibilities and overseeing regional coordinator staff, training and development, the Life Goes On newsletter and the website.

“I have full faith in the commitment and dedication these two individuals have demonstrated,” said Secretary White. “I congratulate Connie and Sitha on their efforts and look forward to working with them as we continue our education and outreach efforts on the lifesaving potential of donation.”

Vikki Tulcus memorial

Vikki was featured in the Secretary of State’s 2012 donor commercial, where she said, “Before, my job depended on organ donation; now, my life depends on it.”

“Vikki’s lively spirit and enthusiasm will be greatly missed in the office and in the donor community,” said Secretary of State Jesse White. “Vikki, who championed donation for years, has touched countless lives through her work and through her personal organ donation experience. Vikki had a giving spirit. Although Vikki died waiting for her gift of life, in the end, she continued advocating donation while she herself waited for a donor. I know that Vikki’s legacy will live on as she continues to inspire others to become organ and tissue donors.”

Vikki lived in the Chicago suburb of Westmont and held a master’s degree in business from North Central College in Naperville. She began her career in organ/tissue donation with Gift of Hope in 2004. She started working for the Secretary of State’s Donor Program in 2007 as an advocate for donation. She will be greatly missed.

Donor Program wins AAMVA awards

The Organ/Tissue Donor Program recently won two American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) PACE awards for top marketing campaigns.

A Public Affairs Award was given for the Life Goes On newsletter story, “Where Are They Now,” published in spring 2011. The story featured Joseph Kralicek, the Secretary of State’s first Organ Donor Poster Contest winner in 1981. The article discussed how transplantation benefited his father, Joe, who was on the waiting list for a liver transplant at the time Joseph entered the contest as an elementary school student. Joseph’s arwork depicted a plea for a donor for his father. The poster was reprinted and displayed at Driver Services facilities as well as schools and libraries across the state.

A PACE Customer Awareness Award was given for the Donor Program’s colorful, 10”x10” counter mats placed in facilities across the state. The mats feature an Illinois driver’s license with the donor emblem highlighted as a reminder to customers to join the registry.

National Donor Sabbath celebrated in IL

Every year, two weekends before Thanksgiving, National Donor Sabbath is observed, a time when faith leaders are encouraged to discuss organ/tissue donation with their congregations. All major world religions embrace donation as a final, charitable act of giving.

This year during the weekend of November 9-11, transplant recipients, donor family members and those waiting for a transplant shared their inspiring stories with others in faith communities across the state. For more information about National Donor Sabbath, visit organdonor.org.

Employee Connection

Areli Franco has always been registered as an organ/tissue donor. As an employee at the Joliet Driver Services facility, she asks the donor question many times a day and knows firsthand the importance of donation.

Areli’s father, Alex, waited three years for a kidney and finally received one from a young woman. Areli’s mother did not always believe in donation and was not in the registry. However, when her husband became ill and was on the waiting list, she understood the importance of being a donor. Alex’s illness made her realize that donation is a gift and that her husband could have a second chance at life because of a generous donor.

Today, because of their personal experience, Areli’s entire family supports donation and would like to meet the family of Alex’s donor. “He is doing so well,” said Areli. “We would love to meet the family to say thank you in person.

“I tell people how important their gift could be to someone else. I know, when someone says ‘yes’ in the facility, that as many as 25 people can be helped.”

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Vikki Tulcus memoriam

It is with deep regret and sorrow that the Organ/Tissue Donor Program staff announces the loss of a very dear friend, coworker and donor advocate, Vikki Tulcus. Vikki died of major organ failure on Jan. 9, 2013. Vikki was on the transplant list and awaiting a kidney.

Vikki was featured in the Secretary of State’s 2012 donor commercial, where she said, “Before, my job depended on organ donation; now, my life depends on it.”

“Vikki’s lively spirit and enthusiasm will be greatly missed in the office and in the donor community,” said Secretary of State Jesse White. “Vikki, who championed donation for years, has touched countless lives through her work and through her personal organ donation experience. Vikki had a giving spirit. Although Vikki died waiting for her gift of life, in the end, she continued advocating donation while she herself waited for a donor. I know that Vikki’s legacy will live on as she continues to inspire others to become organ and tissue donors.”

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