



Organ Donation – Dying Matters

Organ transplantation has been one of the most significant medical breakthroughs that has resulted in many patients getting a renewed lease of life. However, despite this breakthrough, the shortage of donor organs remains a significant challenge. Transplantation would not be possible but for organ donation. Organs can be donated by a living person, after natural death and after “brain death. “The Government of India recognized brain death as a legal form of death in 1994 and passed an Act called the “Transplantation of Human Organs (THO) Act”. This legislation was also enacted to streamline the activities of living transplants especially kidneys. Since this act was passed it has been possible to undertake multi-organ transplant activity from brain dead donors in India.



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Brain death usually happens when there is internal brain haemorrhage and the expanding hematoma cuts off the blood supply to vital sections of the brain thus starving it of oxygen and glucose and leading to death. Bleeding can happen due to a spontaneous rupture of an aneurysmal artery within the brain or more commonly due to a severe head injury that occurs in a road traffic accident. The diagnosis of this condition is clinical and most doctors in intensive care units are familiar with the condition. As we all know the brain is the master conductor that directly or indirectly controls the functioning of the body and once it dies everything is lost. Normally in death as we understand it, the heart comes to a stop first and the brain cells die within a few minutes due to lack of blood circulation but in brain death the reverse takes place.

Brain death is a very tragic situation and the only positive outcome can be organ donation before the machines are switched off. Usually the organ donation request is made in the time interval between the diagnosis of brain death and discontinuation of the ventilator. If the relatives are agreeable the process of organ donation is undertaken and vital organs like heart, lungs, liver, pancreas and kidneys are removed for transplantation. In case of corneas, retrieval can be done up to 6 hours after cardiac standstill. Other tissues like heart valves, skin, bone and cartilages can be removed for up to 48 hrs after death, however, in India due to the heat it is advisable to do it sooner and an upper limit of 12 to 24 hours can be followed. The process of organ donation and transplantation requires coordination between different teams operating almost simultaneously and sometimes in different locations. It may require getting surgeons from different specialities together for both donor and recipient surgery.

There is no age limit to becoming a donor. A person's physical condition, not age, is the deciding factor. Organs and tissues from people in their 70s and 80s have been transplanted successfully. A virology screening is required in all potential donors to prevent possible transmission of disease from donor to recipient. Ultimately, it is the decision of the specialist healthcare professionals that determines which organs and tissues are suitable.



Organ donation is a gift of a lifetime which saves lives of people suffering with organ disease. For example, kidney disease can require people to be on dialysis in hospital for up to 6 hours a day, several days each week, before their organs finally give up and they die. After organ donation, recipients can leave hospital and return to their families, their work and their lives. It's the same for people suffering with liver, heart and all major organ disease.

By taking the decision to donate your organs upon death you can help someone see again, improve their quality of life, keep a family from having to grieve the loss of a loved one..... there's so much that one can do with this altruistic and noble decision, and quite frankly, it's not like that we need them when we are dead anyway!

So, become an organ donor today by picking up your donor card from any hospital or an NGO. A donor card is not a legal document; it is only an expression of your willingness. If a person has a donor card, it means that he/she is willing to donate organs upon death. Remember that in our country even if you have signed the donor card, it is important to bring your family in consensus with your wish, as their decision will be considered final.

To help the cause of organ donation, an NGO called MOHAN (Multi Organ Harvesting Aid Network) FOUNDATION was formed in 1997. The focus of the foundation is aimed at working as a "Support Group for Patients, Physicians & the Public". It distributes Organ Donor Cards and also facilitates the process of donation between various hospitals to ensure that the organs when available are not wasted.

Choose life with MOHAN Foundation...Organ donation is all about giving life - life that only YOU can choose to give to help the thousands of patients waiting for an organ or tissue transplant.