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African-American Organ and Tissue Donors
Changing History
Black History Month Highlights Need for Donors of Color

HARRISBURG, PA (January 25, 2010) – As the accomplishments and sacrifices of African Americans in Pennsylvania are celebrated during Black History Month, more than 2,550 individuals from the African-American community in need of organ or tissue transplantation face an uncertain future.

A shortage of organ and tissue donors means nearly 60 percent of those needing a transplant will wait for more than a year. Many can expect to wait for more than five years. Waiting for matched organs may mean a recipient will be sicker at the time of transplant or, worse, die waiting.

African Americans in Pennsylvania can change the course of history by becoming organ and tissue donors. One organ and tissue donor can give more than 50 people a second chance at life.

“There is a critical need for registered donors from the African-American community in Pennsylvania,” says Janice P. Kopelman, Deputy Secretary of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention for the Pennsylvania Department of Health. “People of color suffer disproportionately from health conditions such as heart disease, hypertension and kidney failure. For many, a transplant is a viable medical option.”

MORE

While African Americans make up 11 percent of the state’s overall population, they represent 32 percent of Pennsylvanians waiting for organ or tissue transplants. The majority, more than 2,200 African Americans, are waiting for kidney transplants.

Organ and tissue donation is an extraordinary way to impact the lives of others, but many myths and misconceptions can interfere with the decision to sign up to become an organ donor. Organ donation is available to people of all ages and at no cost to their family. The process does not interfere with traditional funeral arrangements and is supported by all major religions. Organ donation takes place only after all efforts to save a life have been exhausted. In addition, organs are matched by factors such as blood and tissue types, organ size, medical urgency, waiting time and geographic location without consideration of wealth or social status.

The following is a list of Pennsylvanians whose lives have been impacted by organ donation:

- Diane Royster, of Pittsburgh, is celebrating her 20th year as a liver transplant recipient. Since that time she has worked hard to promote the importance of organ donation within the African-American community through her volunteer work with CORE.
- Michelle Smith, of Harrisburg, donated a kidney to her brother who developed health issues following his service in the Vietnam War. Smith has enjoyed watching her brother become an active grandparent.
- Philadelphia's 4th District Councilman Curtis Jones Jr. amidst his work and commitment to the residents of Philadelphia became a living kidney donor to his younger brother. By giving this gift of life, the Councilman was able to aide in his brother's speedy and healthy recovery.

Becoming an organ and tissue donor is as simple as adding the donor designation to your driver's license, learner's permit or state identification card. Sign up at your local Department of Motor Vehicles or by visiting www.donatelife-pa.org because *Life Begins with You*.

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About CORE

CORE is a regional not-for-profit agency that is the primary call center and intermediary for the organ recovery and allocation process that serves 155 hospitals and more than six million people in western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Chemung County in New York. CORE has helped to pioneer organ procurement allocation and recovery for this region since it was founded in 1977 as the Pittsburgh Transplant Foundation. For more information visit www.core.org

About Gift of Life Donor Program

Since 1974, Gift of Life Donor Program has served as the link between donors and patients awaiting life-saving transplants in the eastern half of Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey and Delaware. In that tenure, Gift of Life has coordinated more than 28,000 life-saving organ transplants and hundreds of thousand tissue transplants. For more information, visit www.donors1.org

Life Begins with You Campaign

The *Life Begins with You* campaign is a collaborative initiative between Gift of Life Donor Program (GOL), the Center for Organ & Recovery Education (CORE) – the two organ procurement organizations serving Pennsylvania – and the Pennsylvania Departments of Health and Transportation. It is funded by state residents through voluntary contributions included with driver's license renewals, vehicle registrations and state income tax filings. All contributions are used by the Governor Robert P. Casey Memorial Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Trust Fund to educate residents, build awareness about the importance of organ and tissue donation, and increase the number of people who sign up to become donors on their driver's license, learner's permit or state identification card.

One Extraordinary Way to Say Love Life.

When you choose to become an organ and tissue donor, you have the power to give the most precious gift – life. Join the nearly four million Pennsylvanians who have said "yes" to organ and tissue donation by adding the donor designation to your driver's license, learner's permit or state identification card. Sign up to be an organ and tissue donor today by visiting www.donatelife-pa.org because *Life Begins with You*.

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