Organ Donation: A Life Saving Gift

The idea of helping someone less fortunate is not a novel idea in our society. However, when people think about helping someone by giving a part of their body away, they become uncomfortable. According to Donate Life America, a Web site that promotes donation, organ donation is “the process of giving an organ or a part of an organ for the purpose of transplantation into another person” (“Understanding Donation”). In addition to organs (like the heart, liver, and eye), tissue, blood, and corneas can be donated when a person dies. It is also possible to donate parts of organs or entire organ (like a kidney) while living.

Organ, eye, and tissue donation has the potential to enhance or save the lives of many people. Surprisingly, however, most people in this country will never donate. If everyone chose to donate whatever they could during their lifetimes and after their death, a lot of grief for families could be prevented.

The most compelling argument for organ donation comes from statistics. Over 100,000 people need organ transplants right now, and someone is added to the waiting list every ten minutes ("Understanding Donation"). In 2009, a total of 7,048 patients died while waiting for an organ. This number is up from 2000, when it was only 5,000 (Delmonico). If more people were willing to donate their organs after death or even contribute while they are living, these numbers could decrease substantially.

The most common organ donor is someone who has experienced brain death. Brain death is “the death of the brain stem, and the diagnosis of brain death is made by examining the function of nerves that originate in the brain stem” (Kerridge 89). For someone to be considered as a donor after death, he or she must first be declared to be brain dead. Someone who is brain dead appears to be alive. The person continues to breathe with the help of a ventilator, and the body remains warm. Therefore, families often have a difficult time recognizing that the person is dead. The prospect of organ donation can be therapeutic to a family going through a difficulty time. It is the one good thing that can come out of an unfortunate situation. The family may feel that by donating organs, their loved one did not die in vain.

Even if the person is not eligible to donate organs to someone else, he or she can donate them to research that may further medical knowledge. In 2007, researchers discovered the link between the Epstein-Barr virus and multiple sclerosis by examining the postmortem brain tissue of a donor who had MS (“Brain Tissue”). This advance in science occurred only because someone’s family members decided that they wanted to try to help others with MS, even though their own family member could no longer be helped.
I have volunteered for fours years with upstate New York Transplant Services, which works to promote organ donation awareness. I have become close to a woman who chose to work with UNYTS because of a personal experience. Her four-year-old daughter was diagnosed with a failing heart and needed a transplant as soon as possible. Every day, the girl’s breathing became more labored. Finally, a heart was located. After she had a transplant, however, she began to lose blood and required a large amount of blood. Because of the generosity of a family and countless individual blood donors, this young girl now lives a healthy life. Her family is forever thankful for the gift that she received. They often hold blood drives in her name.

Some people dislike the prospect of organ donation, either for themselves or for their loved ones. Usually, these people have misconceptions about it. The Mayo Clinic Web site addresses some of these mistaken ideas in "Organ Donation: Don't Let These Myths Confuse You."

Many people believe that if they are a registered organ donor, the hospital staff won't work as hard to save their life. This is not true. The doctor who tries to help you is not the same doctor who would be concerned with the transplantation. Your doctor's job is to save your life. In that moment, he cares about nothing else.

Others worry that they won't be dead when the death certificate is signed. This is highly unlikely. According to the Mayo Clinic, “people who have agreed to organ donation are given more tests (at no charge to their families) to determine that they are truly dead than those who haven’t agreed to organ donation.” These tests would be reassuring to the family, as well.

Another major concern that comes up is disfiguration of the body. People believe that they won’t be able to have an open-casket funeral if they donate their organs. This is untrue. The body is clothed so that no signs of organ donation can be seen. For bone donation, a rod may be inserted in place of the bone. For skin donation, a small sample of skin can be taken from the back of the donor and placed where the donated skin was taken.

Finally, many people worry whether their religion accepts organ donation. Courtney S. Campbell addresses this issue in her article “Religion and the Body in Medical Research.” She recognizes two key characteristics of organ donation—“altruistic intent” and “therapeutic expectation” (281)—that explain why most religions accept it. Altruistic intent means that the donor is giving an important gift to the recipient without expecting anything in return. Therapeutic expectation means that this gift is expected to “offer a pronounced therapeutic prospect for the recipient” (281). Basically, these concepts simply mean that because the donor is trying to help someone else save his or her life, donation is acceptable in almost any situation.
Campbell also identifies the specific beliefs that some major religions hold about organ donation. In Judaism, a great deal of importance is placed on the preservation of the body after death. Campbell says, however, that “this presumption can be overridden...by the requirement of pikkuah nefesh, the saving of human life” (281). Roman Catholicism holds much the same belief. Islam believes organ donation to be acceptable as well, as long as the remaining parts of the body are buried. Most Protestant denominations have no objection to organ and tissue donation.

Most people decide not to donate their organs for reasons that are untrue. If everyone donated their organs when they died, we would make enormous advances in science as well as save countless lives. The best way to become an organ donor is to talk to your family. If they know what you want to happen when you pass away, they are much more likely to carry out your wishes. In most states, you can also sign the back of your driver’s license to indicate that you would like to be an organ donor. Organ donor cards are available on line, and many states have a donor registry that you can become part of. Become an organ donor; save a life!

1. Create a brief “Toulmin Analysis” of this student essay.
2. Evaluate the sources for credibility and effectiveness.
3. Review and correct the “Works Cited” page.

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Objections from the Skep. Reader

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Conclusion? (Convincing or Persuading?)
Works Cited


[What corrections can you offer for this Works Cited page?]

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