

Should I Become an Organ Donor?

When you get or renew your driver's license, you are asked a critical question that has nothing to do with your ability to drive a car safely. The choice to register as an organ donor is an emotional and generous one.

Standing in line at the DMV isn't the right time and place to decide to become an organ donor.

"Every donation process is a miracle and an ever-lasting legacy," says A. Salama, M.D., Executive Director of the Life Alliance Organ Recovery Agency (LAORA).

LAORA is a federally accredited organ procurement organization that serves patients and families at the University of Miami Health System as well as all hospitals throughout South Florida. "We also provide community education and engagement regarding organ donation and other services," Dr. Salama says.

Those who decide to be organ donors have the potential to save lives and help others regain bodily functions.

"An organ donor may be able to save eight lives and improve many more through

tissue and cornea donation," he says.

This is true for donors of any age, including those with some medical conditions.

Many families have concerns about what happens to a donor's body through the process of organ donation. Dr. Salama reassures donors and families that "organ, tissue, and cornea donation are surgical procedures that are done with the utmost respect. We at LAORA consider the process itself sacred. Open casket viewing, religious ceremonies, and burial/cremation are routinely done after organ donation.

"It is humbling to see many family members of donor heroes volunteer as advocates for organ donation and keep the legacy of their loved ones alive."

LAORA also works to dispel misconceptions that deter community members from participating in this life-saving program. Some fear that doing so will limit the emergency medical care they would receive if they had a near-fatal accident or condition. They may think that EMTs or other medical professionals would prioritize their viable organs over administering life-saving treatments. "This is an unfortunate misconception and completely untrue," Dr. Salama says.



When hospitals treat patients with

devastating injuries, they often consult organ procurement organizations.

"If/when the time comes for the hospital team to engage the patient's family in an end-of-life discussion, LAORA or another organ procurement organization discusses with the family if organ donation would fit the legacy of their loved one."

When someone is on life-support or dies unexpectedly, loved ones may be left with a difficult decision. In this situation, many families decline to authorize organ donation. Making your end-of-life wishes clear and official when you're well can relieve your family of that added stress and guarantee that your desire to donate is honored.

Living organ donation is another option for those interested in helping meet the tremendous national need for kidney, liver, and other full and partial organ transplants. This process takes place at transplant centers without the involvement of organ procurement organizations.

Suppose you didn't register as an organ donor when you got your driver's license. In that case, you can still sign up with your local tax collection organization or, if you're a Florida resident, at Donate Life Florida. "When you register to be an organ donor and become someone's miracle, please also make your wishes known to your loved ones," Dr. Salama says. Your status will appear on your driver's license.

Dana Kantrowitz is a contributing writer for UMiami Health News.

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