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SOUTH AFRICANS URGED TO REGISTER AS ORGAN DONORS - ORGAN DONOR MONTH

04 August 2015: Statistics from the South African Organ Donor Foundation (ODF) indicate that there are about 4 300 South Africans awaiting life-saving organs and cornea transplants. In light of Organ Donor Month this August, South Africans are urged to register as proud organ donors during Organ Donor Month.

Dr Dominique Stott, Executive: Medical Standards and Services at PPS, says that the number of patients who require organs are on the increase, though the number of donor organs available remain stagnant. “This means that there is not only a chronic shortage of available organs but that, as a result, many patients who need a life-saving transplant have to wait many years longer or do not receive an organ transplant in time. Donors provide essential organs, without which patients could otherwise suffer significant disability or death.”

Samantha Nicholls, Executive Director at the Organ Donor Foundation, explained that by registering as an organ donor with the ODF, it serves a dual purpose. “Firstly, a registered organ donor will be listed on a national database. Secondly, the registered organ donor must communicate his wish to be an organ donor with his family as there is a system of required consent in South Africa. This discussion translates to more people becoming aware of organ donation.”

“The ODF believes that organ donors give people who have suffered a long-term illness hope for a healthy and dramatically improved quality of life. Consumer awareness and education in South Africa around the importance of being an organ donor is crucial. The number of children and adults awaiting lifesaving organ and cornea transplants, currently at about 4 300, is escalating every month and we anticipate that the low number of organ donors might become pandemic in the near future,” adds Nicholls.

Dr Stott says that organs that can be transplanted successfully include life-saving solid organs such as the kidney, liver, pancreas, lungs and heart which can save up to seven Lives as well as tissue which includes the corneas, skin, bone and heart valves. This can improve the quality of life of up to 50 more people. “It is also possible for a living donor to donate and live a normal life following donation of one of their kidneys to family member or friend awaiting a kidney transplant.”

Dr Stott advises that organs may only be procured from a person who is a donor who has been declared brain stem dead and their family have agreed to the donation. The majority of these donors are often trauma patients from tragic accidents. She explains that medical professionals will assess a donor’s suitability based on the condition of the donor at the time.

“It is essential that the public notify family members if and when they register to be an organ donor, in an effort to save time should a tragedy occur. Doctors need to work very quickly once a patient has been declared brain stem dead to ensure they harvest the organs within the strict time period and obtain the family’s permission, all of which can be time consuming and if actioned too late may mean the organs will not be utilized.”

In the case where a patient is not a registered organ donor, the medical staff will approach the family to obtain the consent for the organs to be procured.

“Since the first successful solid organ transplant in the 1950’s, the surgical techniques, technology and immunosuppression required have improved significantly. There is no age restriction to register as organ donor. It is essential that more South Africans register as organ donors, as one healthy adult can potentially help save the lives of up to seven individuals,” states Dr Stott.

Nicholls urges consumers to visit the Organ Donor Foundation website at www.odf.org.za or **call Toll Free: 0800 22 66 11** to register. Once they have registered they will receive an information pack with their organ donor card and stickers, concludes Nicholls.