

HRSA's Division of Transplantation: Reaching Out to Minorities

By Jean Oxendine

Closing the Gap, Organ and Tissue Donation • May 1998

Minorities should be concerned about organ donation and transplantation because they are disproportionately affected by diabetes, kidney disease, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other conditions that can lead to organ failure, according to Mary Ganikos, chief of the HHS Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Division of Transplantation (DOT's) Public and Professional Education Branch. Members of different racial and ethnic groups are usually more genetically similar to members of their own groups than they are to others, Ganikos said. Increasing the minority donor pool increases the likelihood that good matches can be made for minority patients.

Promoting organ donation in minority communities is a priority for DOT. In order to educate the public on DOT, it is important to understand its activities. Since the National Organ Transplant Act of 1984 was passed, HRSA has overseen our national transplant system. DOT has a contract with the Richmond-based United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) to administer the following programs:

- The Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN): The OPTN maintains a national computerized list of the more than 51,000 patients waiting for organ transplantation, as well as a 24 hour-a-day computerized organ placement center that matches donors and recipients. The goal is to ensure equitable access to organs and to guarantee that scarce organs are recovered and used safely and efficiently. The network includes all 280 transplant centers, 64 organ procurement organizations, and other health and medical organizations.
- The Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients has information on all recipients of kidney, heart, liver, heart-lung, and pancreas transplants since October 1, 1987. The registry tracks all patients from the time of transplant to hospital discharge, and also follows those cases that end in transplant failure or death.
- The National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP): The NMDP is a non-profit organization in Minneapolis. The program is a network of 99 donor centers, 111 collection centers, 106 transplant centers, and 12 recruitment groups. The NMDP also studies the effectiveness of marrow transplants and related treatments. The program has undertaken a national effort to increase the number of potential donors who are African American, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and American Indian.

Other HRSA activities:

- Education: DOT conducts public and professional initiatives to improve awareness of organ and tissue transplantation. This includes spreading the word through exhibits and seminars, and collaborations with the Coalition on Donation and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators.
- Grant Program: Since 1986, DOT has awarded 95 grants to organizations that work to improve public and professional education on organ donation. Since 1989, special emphasis has been on minority organ donation.

Promotion and outreach efforts towards minorities are on the increase. The NMDP is concerned about the need for volunteer marrow donors from African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Hispanics, and American Indians and Alaska Natives. To address this need, the NMDP is currently conducting four specially targeted national recruitment campaigns to increase Registry representation of minority volunteers. By reaching each community through ethnic and mainstream media, community groups and individuals, the NMDP will ensure that patients of every racial and ethnic background will have a better chance of finding a matched donor.

An insert on DOT and its activities was included in a recent issue of *The Journal for Minority Medical Students*. That issue, which focuses on transplantation, was published in Winter 1998 (Vol. 10, No.2) To order a back issue, call Spectrum Unlimited Publishing at 504-488-5100. DOT also plans on participating in a meeting of the Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC) on May 12-13, 1998. "We hope that the CNBC network will assist us in promoting donation in African American communities," Ganikos said.

If you'd like to play a role in educating minorities about organ donation, Ganikos suggests letting friends, family, professional contacts, patients, and others know about the unique need in minority communities. You may help save lives.

For more information on DOT, call 301-443-7577. The division distributes several publications including: *Q & A About Organ Donation (includes organ donor card)*; *Financing Transplantation-What Every Patient Needs to Know*; and *Organ Donor Cards*. DOT is also on the World Wide Web: <http://www.hrsa.dhhs.gov/osp/dot> ❖

