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College Reading & Writing

Got Organs?

Pounding the ball in the wood, Rolfes looks down court as he and teammate, Cole race to successfully break the 2-on-1 fast break. The defense goes for Rolfes' fake pass to Cole and Rolfes moves in for a right-handed lay-up. As Rolfes goes in for his lay-up, his left knee buckles under the pressure and the ball barely advances out of his right hand – not even touching the backboard. After catching himself, Rolfes' face reveals an anxious look, realizing something is terribly wrong. Arriving home from open gym, my brother's knee is swollen to the size of a small watermelon. After visiting his doctor, it was discovered that Matt (my brother) had a condition called Avascular Necrosis (AVN) to his patella. This disease required him to receive a cadaver donor kneecap and he was placed on the donor list. With tens of thousands of Americans waiting on an organ donor list, like my brother, it is unfortunate to have numerous usable organs go to waste.

Organ transplants are often needed for victims in car accidents, burn victims, eye problems, and knee transplants. AVN is a condition resulting from a blood supply shortage – either temporary or permanent – to the bones. Without constant blood supply, the bone and tissue around it dies, triggering the bone to deteriorate and collapse (Penn State). Although AVN can occur in any bone, it most commonly found at the ends of long bones and may disturb multiple bones at once. This disease affects both men and women, commonly between the ages of thirties and forties (Avascular Necrosis). To

reconstruct this damage, a cartilage transplant surgery called fresh osteochondrol allograft is necessary (Bugbee). Before becoming a candidate for this operation, the size of knee cap he needed was determined and he was placed on a donor's list.

Susan Stuart, president of CORE (Center for Organ Recovery & Education) said, "Organ and tissue donation saves and enhances the lives of those who are in desperate need," (Transplant Medicine). In western Pennsylvania and West Virginia, the highest number of overall transplants occurred in 2005, a record number of patients lingered for their life-saving transplant. Even with the record number of transplants, 29 patients died waiting for an organ transplant (Transplant Medicine). The increase in organ donations and transplants is also occurring across the U.S. and similar to Pennsylvania and West Virginia, the demand for donated organs and tissues is greater than the supply.

A majority of people don't realize how much they can help, Stuart adds, "One organ and tissue donor has the potential to save and enhance more than 50 lives..." (Transplant Medicine). More than 91,000 patients in the U.S. need an organ transplant, and across the U.S. an average of 18 people die each day needing an organ; according to UNOS – the national organ allocation system (Transplant Medicine). Over the next 12 months, more than 40,000 names will be added onto the donor list (New Solution). However, while many of these people wait on the list, many will become too sick to experience a transplant, or these people will die before receiving a transplant.

Those in need of organ transplants extend far beyond what many may realize. When thinking of transplants, many only consider hearts, livers, kidneys, lungs, and skin – with skin being the most needed organ. However, other transplants include knees, knuckles, eyes, and brains. Many of these lesser known transplants have only occurred in

the past years and are considered “experimental surgery”, although they are considered safe. For example, my brother’s knee surgery was considered an “exploratory surgery” – even though they have been performing this procedure since 1983. Too many patients waiting on a donor list need an organ to live; however, there are some on the list who solely want to regain their old lifestyle.

Along with donor lists, doctors must find a perfect match between a donor and a patient due to the patient’s life and well-being. For example, a surgeon must speak with his or her patient about risk, serious disease, age, and mental and emotional health (Kittredge). The patient must understand the risks and benefits of surgery because they must freely agree to undergo surgery. If the patient has other serious diseases, he or she couldn’t profit as significantly as another person. Generally, younger patients are favored in organ transplant operations because they can benefit longer. A patient must have a strong desire to live and be trusted not to partake in organ damaging habits.

The waiting period of receiving an organ is a strenuous road because of the lengthy wait and the amount of time you have to ponder your transplant. Waiting for an organ is taxing because you want the organ to come so quickly, but then the realization of someone dying hits and you feel guilty. Following a drawn-out wait for an organ, the patient may think the transplant will fix all of his or her medical problems; while in reality it doesn’t and he or she may become depressed. While waiting for a cadaver knee cap, my brother began to feel guilty because he was waiting for a 17-year-old boy to die. In addition, Matt constantly wishing to play basketball, but always considering his body rejecting the knee cap – crashing all of his dreams.

Before Matt's knee problem, I never thought much about organ donors and patients. Although I am an organ donor, I never gave it much thought and I didn't realize how taxing the wait is. With so many people needing an organ transplant – in the U.S. alone – people think doctors solely want your organs, if you're an organ donor. In truth, doctors will do everything in their power to ensure the life of their patient. Laws have been enacted in many states stating organs can only be removed for a transplant when all brain function has permanently stopped (Kittredge). We as a nation need to realize the importance of our decision's before it's too late. By becoming an organ donor, you could help save another's life.

Hesitation to donate a family member's organs may occur when a family wants to hold an open-casket wake service. This worry is unnecessary because artificial bones can replace real bones, and organ and skin transplants removed from the deceased person's body are unnoticeable to the eye (Kittredge). Although some families will ask questions about cadaver transplants, many families do not consider cadaver donation. Families who may consider organ donations have not been asked by their physician and are mourning over the lost of a loved one and haven't thought of organ donation.

Though many people agree organ donation is a good thing, many don't become organ donors. The demand for organ transplants has grown extensively; however, the number of donated organs remains the same. Every year about 20,000 transplantable organs are incarcerated or buried, even though they could have been used to relieve the suffering of a living person (Kittredge). Although we do not want to think about death during a doctors appointment, applying for a driver's license, or during the school day; we need to know the importance of becoming an organ donor.

An organ donor helped my brother regain his normal lifestyle. With the help of an unselfish young man, my brother's dreams of playing basketball his senior year were kept alive. With his new knee cap and strong work ethic, Matt received a starting position and was a captain on his basketball team.

By becoming an organ donor, you can help another person live a longer and healthier life – even after you're gone.

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