

Donate organs, and end a painful wait

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No one likes to wait. It's a hurry-up world.

But eventually the waiting line shrinks, the traffic jams clear, the e-mail arrives, the phone call comes, and our lives go on as usual.

There are those, however, for whom the waiting is stressful, painful. They know they can't wait much longer, because each day that passes without help brings them closer to death.

They are the 4,500 people in Illinois who are on the waiting list for an organ transplant.

Nationally, 97,899 people are waiting on organ donations, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Sadly, 250 to 300 people will die this year in Illinois because of a shortage of donated organs. The number of people needing donations is rising much faster than the number of available donors.

The good news is that the people of Illinois have been responsive in donating organs.

Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White announced earlier this month that enlistment in a new organ donation program -- the First Person Consent Organ/Tissue Donor Registry -- topped 3 million.

Since Jan. 1, 2006, Illinois has operated this new donor consent registry. This means that an organ donor's wishes cannot be altered by relatives, well-meaning or otherwise, at the time of death. Once a resident registers, his or her wishes must be honored. A person's decision to donate is now legally binding.

The Daily Herald fully supported this change. White estimates that this new registry saves 100 more lives every year.

Yet this registry is incomplete, because anyone who registered to be an organ donor before Jan. 1, 2006, must now do so again to be covered under the new law.

Fortunately, it's easy to get your name on the current organ donor list if you haven't already done so. You can join the new registry by going to www.LifeGoesOn.com, visit any Illinois Secretary of State driver services facility, or call the Illinois Secretary of State Organ/Tissue Donor Program at (800) 210-2106.

We know that for some, a decision to donate organs is not always an easy one, on a personal basis.

But any uncertainty should be eased by one simple persuasive fact -- a single organ and tissue donor can save or improve the lives of as many as 50 recipients.

Minorities have a particularly high need for organ transplants because some diseases of the kidney, heart, lung, pancreas and liver are found more frequently in racial and ethnic minority populations than in the general population, according to HHS.

People needing organ transplants are counting on the kindness of strangers. Bring an end to their wait by putting your name on the donation registry list, before their illness ends their lives.