



Organ Donor? Make Sure Your Wish is Granted

Reported by: Lori Obert - WMBD/WYZZ

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WMBD/WYZZ - PEORIA -- Organ and tissue transplants provide new life to tens of thousands of patients every year. Sometimes, though, family disagreements get in the way of planned donations. There are close to 100,000 people waiting for organ donations in the united states, nearly five thousand of them in Illinois. More than 6 million people in the state of Illinois are registered as donors. But if you signed up before January 1, 2006, you should know, your wishes may not be granted.

Prior to January 1, 2006, when the "first-person consent law" was passed, if you signed up as an organ-tissue donor, there was no guarantee that wish would be fulfilled. Additional consent from family was still required to carry out the donation.

"Before, when you signed the back of your license that you were giving your consent, your family still had to give final consent. The new legislation gives your final wishes. Your decision is being honored, and can not be overridden by family," said Dee Tilton, who volunteers with Gift of Hope , and whose family has been touched twice by organ donation.

Though the law has been in effect for close to two years, three million people are still registered under the old law. So if you want the decision to be yours alone, you have to re-register. Or your family will be required to make what can be a difficult decision in a time of grief.

"At least twenty percent of the time a family will override someone's wishes where this way your wishes are honored," Tilton said.

Dee's husband Jim received a kidney transplant eighteen years ago. And her son, Jeff, who died in 2001 at age 33, had his organs donated. "It kind of brings your family through that grieving time to know that his life went on to help others, and give them new hope and new life."

Though the grief that followed Jeff's death was heavy, Dee says her son's gift has kept his spirit alive for his family. "To his girls and his stepkids, he is a real hero," Tilton said.

An average of 18 people die each day waiting for their hero. And another name is added to the national transplant waiting list every 12 minutes. The Tiltons encourage people to help by signing up as a donor, or re-registering under the new law.

"It was a miracle. If it wasn't for somebody being thoughtful enough to sign up for a donor, and unfortunately having an accident, I probably wouldn't be here today," Jim said.

The Secretary of State's Office also urges donors still signed up under the old law to re-register. You can do so, or sign up as a new donor by calling 800-210-2106 or going to www.lifegoeson.com .