

COA Launches Operation Give-a-Life

The Commissioned Officers Association is proud to announce a collaborative public health campaign. With the guidance and support of several previous Surgeons General and Acting Surgeons General, as well as the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations and the National Marrow Donor Program, this Corps-wide campaign provides a life giving opportunity for everyone. The **Give-a-Life Program** consists of a two- part message to be delivered to every officer in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, their family members, and their communities.

Part One Message: We all know that organ and tissue transplantation gives hope to thousands of people with organ failure, and changes the lives of many others. Possible donations include heart, lung, liver, kidneys, pancreas, small bowel, corneas, ligaments, and bone. But the need continues to vastly outnumber supply. The latest statistics from August are that 111,736 patients are waiting organ transplants alone, with many more needing tissue or corneal transplant. Over 60,000 of those patients are described as multi-cultural and pediatric patients number 1,785. While it is a wonderful thing to know that 28,663 transplants occurred in 2010, it is painful to contemplate the status of over 111,000 others who are still waiting.

As members of the world's foremost public health institution, we are confident that many of you have already individually taken the steps needed to be a donor; there are undoubtedly many others who have not – usually for a reason as simple as an absence of opportunity. But the COA and our partners would like to take this campaign a bit further. We recommend that every officer sign a donor card, as well as talk to his or her family members and neighbors, to recruit them to make a similar commitment.

Where do you get a donor card? The last page of this document has a printable version of a donor card that you and your friends and family can use. That same card can be copied and used in community-wide registration drives. The signed card should then be permanently carried in the donor's wallet or purse.

Part Two Message: Bone marrow/stem cell transplantation is now a godsend for many patients suffering from many malignant and non-malignant bone marrow diseases. Stem cell transplant can be the only effective method of enabling a patient's bone marrow to produce healthy white blood cells, red blood cells, and/or platelets, and reduce the risk of life-threatening infections, anemias, or bleeding. Stem cell transplantation can replace dysfunctional bone marrow such as that found in aplastic anemia. Also, the stem cell transplant process can also destroy unhealthy bone marrow that may be creating certain cancer cells, followed by the transplantation of healthy stem cells that can enable normal cell production.

To be considered as a potential bone marrow/stem cell donor, officers must have a blood draw or a buccal swab, which must be submitted to the National Marrow Donor Program. This blood draw or buccal swab does not involve any expense to the officer or their family.

In partnership with the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP), COA will work through our larger branches to organize events at which buccal swabs will be collected. Self-swab kits with mail-in procedures will be made available to officers in smaller branches and remote areas.

Successfully matching a donor with a patient must entail a very high probability of resulting in a positive outcome for the patient. Therefore, it is very desirable to substantially increase the donor pool so that the receiving patient has every chance for a successful result.

The NMDP estimates that someone in the donor pool has a likelihood of 1 in 560 of being contacted to request a stem cell donation for a matched patient. Please know that, if you are contacted, you very probably represent the only chance of survival for that matched patient. The choice of donation is yours, and becoming a member of the donor pool is not a binding commitment.

Although becoming a potential donor in the bone marrow/stem cell donor pool is not as simple as signing an organ donor card (as described in Message Part One), it is every bit as critical to a positive patient outcome, and every bit as important to the public health of our country.

As Public Health Service commissioned officers, you have dedicated yourselves as leaders in service to the public trust to improve the health of the Nation. With the love and support of your families, and often your communities at large, you guide the adoption of healthier behaviors and attitudes. And sometimes, we have the opportunity to give something of ourselves that will ultimately save a life or provide a living legacy. It is this higher calling that we appeal to with our newest campaign.

Measurement and Goals: As with any meaningful undertaking, it is important to measure the program's impact. Without measurement, it is not effective for the COA and our partners to talk about **Give-a-Life** to administration officials, legislators, educators, and potential Commissioned Corps recruits.

COA will establish appropriate tools through our website where individuals can register their willingness to be an organ donor and record their registration as potential bone marrow donors. These procedures will be announced in future issues of *Frontline*, through COA Local Branches, on our website and Facebook pages.

Without disclosing any private health information, we can tell you that, among the 111,000 people awaiting transplant, there are currently Commissioned Corps active duty officers, retirees, and their family members who need an organ donation, a tissue donation, or a stem cell transplant. And as of today, they have no matched donor. The COA can think of no better way to illustrate your commitment to advancing the public health of this nation as an entire service than to join together and **Give-a-Life**.



COA Give A Life ~ Organ Donor Card

I want to help others to live in the event of my death.

NAME.....

DATE OF BIRTH..... BLOOD TYPE.....

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFO.....

.....

Keep this card with you at all times. Let your relatives know your wishes.

After my death, I wish to donate my organs. I wish to give:

Any needed organ or tissue

Only these organs:

Corneas Kidneys Heart

Lungs Liver Pancreas

SIGNATURE & DATE.....

Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

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