ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Organ and tissue transplantation is an ever-growing field of medicine, and with new techniques, medications, and technology, the need for lifesaving organ and tissue donation continues to increase. When a death occurs, organs such as the heart, lungs, liver, or kidneys can be transplanted to replace damaged or diseased organs in a recipient. Tissues, such as skin, bone, or cartilage, may be used for grafts in burn victims or reconstruction in trauma patients or those with degenerative disease.

A large number of the suitable organ and tissue donors fall under medical examiner jurisdiction. With an ever-growing need for organs and tissues for transplantation, the Medical Examiner recognizes the need to permit organ and tissue recovery whenever possible and *only when there is next-of-kin or prior consent***,** while balancing its statutory requirements to ensure the integrity of the body to allow determination of cause and manner of death, collection of evidence, and documentation of injuries and natural disease.

To those ends, we work closely with Lifesharing, the County's only organ and tissue procurement organization, and the San Diego Eye Bank in order to give consent for organ and tissue recovery prior to and following autopsy while at the same time ensuring that all necessary documentation is made. A culture of bi-directional communication between the Medical Examiner and procurement organizations allows maximization of donation, which benefits not only the recipients of organs and tissues, but also grieving families who may find some solace in the knowledge that even with the loss of a loved one, they were able to improve, or even save, the life of one or more recipients.

Tissue donation: During 2010, 603 donors were recovered in the Lifesharing Operating Suite at the Medical Examiner Facility. Because a single tissue donor can help up to 50 people, this represents a significant impact in terms of enhancing lives. 44% of Lifesharing's tissue donors were Medical Examiner cases; 125 donors were direct Medical Examiner referrals. Of the remaining cases, consent for donation was not permitted for medicolegal reasons, the patient had not pre-registered to be a donor and the family did not give consent for donation, or other factors prevented donation.

Organ donation: Last year was a record year for Lifesharing in terms of donors. Of Lifesharing's 108 donors for 2010, 53% were Medical Examiner cases resulting in the procurement of 195 organs with 167 of those being transplanted.

Eye/cornea donation: In 2010, the San Diego Eye Bank recovered corneas from 148 donors at the Medical Examiner.

The above statistics highlight the importance of the Medical Examiner's close working relationships with Lifesharing and the Eye Bank: our office not only assists the families of our cases, but is also a part of the chain that allows donation of organs and tissues to those in need.