

Donation Rates Increase in Minority Populations

Study findings published in JACS

Minority organ donations have more than doubled since the introduction of grassroots awareness and education programs targeted toward minority populations, according to a new retrospective study published in the May issue of the *Journal of the American College of Surgeons*. In 2010, the percentage of minority donors is expected to reach 35 percent, up from approximately 15 percent in 1990.

Since the first organ transplant in 1954, the shortage of organ donors has been, and continues to be, a major challenge. Organ shortages have been most acute among minorities.

African Americans are especially hard-hit; they comprise 34 percent of the kidney waiting list but only 14 percent of the U.S. population overall. There are a number of reasons for that disparity, including the incidence of diabetes and high blood pressure among the African American population.

And, despite the need, African Americans have historically been reluctant to register as an organ donor. An awareness of the scarcity of minority donors was the impetus for a grassroots program that began more than 30 years ago.

In 1978, 40 individuals came together at Howard University in Washington, D.C., to gain an understanding of why minorities are reluctant to become organ donors. Those individuals uncovered five key obstacles: (1) lack of awareness, (2) religious beliefs and misperceptions, (3) distrust of the medical community, (4) fear of premature death after signing a donor card and (5) fear of racism.

The group also learned that face-to-face discussions with people who are culturally sensitive and ethnically similar helped overcome those obstacles.


GRASS ROOTS BEGINNINGS

A local grassroots program began as a consequence of that gathering, and it has now grown into a national initiative that is funded with \$10 million from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other sources.

Clive Callender, M.D., FACS, a transplantation pioneer and professor of surgery at Howard University, is the founder of that initiative—MOTTEP, or the Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program.

Callender explains that the program was established to increase organ and tissue donation among the African American community and also within multiple ethnic minority groups. Now, he continued, MOTTEP has added a disease-prevention aspect that focuses on educational efforts to decrease the rate of ethnic minority Americans who need transplants in the first place.

MOTTEP focuses on overcoming the challenges associated with minority donation by using the strategies of community participation and direction, face-to-face presentations, collaboration and partnerships, media promotion, information dissemination and more.

The national MOTTEP model reaches an average of 700,000 people each year. It has been adapted to local MOTTEP site efforts in Honolulu (focusing on Filipino and Hawaiian Pacific Islander communities), Chicago and northwest Indiana, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Detroit and other selected sites across the country. 



For more information, visit mottep.org.