

# Now is the time to learn about organ transplants

*This article is dedicated to Shari Schnall, all the people who are waiting for an organ donation, and all those who gave the gift of life.*



**VICKI ISACOWITZ**  
On education

**M**iracles are popular in

thought this time of year. Most people wish for happiness, love and success. Others wish for good health, and some are wishing for organ transplants that will save their lives.

Learning about organ donation is critical and crucial, regardless of whether or not you are a donor. Before last summer, I was ignorant about the process. I became more educated on the procedure of obtaining and donating organs through the realistic and frightening experience of a close friend back in New York.

## Shari's story

Shari's story is truly a miracle. This is a condensed and edited version of true accounts: A strong healthy motivated woman suddenly falls ill. She is informed that bed rest will cure her ailment. However, a few days later, Shari is unconscious in her apartment and rushed to the emergency room by her fiancé who she is to marry in four months. After being diagnosed with liver failure, she is put on "the list" to hopefully receive a healthy liver that will save her life. Time became Shari's opponent as she waited in the intensive care transplant unit of one of New York's best hospitals. The continuation of Shari's life and ability to survive came into question with unknown answers. It was understood that within a matter of days, a complete donor had to be found due to the severity of her condition. No

other options were available. Through the hope and selfless work of friends and family, awareness of organ donation was spread in the plight to educate people about Shari's condition. She proved all the doctors wrong by

holding on for six more weeks. On Aug. 6, a matching organ was found through the established national system. A dry eye was nowhere to be found at Shari's wedding. She celebrates life today because of organ donation.

## 17 people die daily, waiting

As of this moment in time, 90,642 people are on national waiting lists for an organ donation that will save or enhance their life. Sadly, 17 people die every day while waiting for an organ.

Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) maintains a national registry for organ matching. This nonprofit organization is under the umbrella of the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS). According to information on their Web site, [www.optn.org](http://www.optn.org), OPTN works by using a highly developed computerized system to assess all medical factors among donors and candidates while prioritizing potential recipients.

Transplant physicians receive information for OPTN, then make the decision regarding the acceptance of a specific organ.

Many factors are considered

when placing names on the national list. A few include: severity of illness, time spent waiting, blood type, and other important medical information.

One organ and tissue donation can save and enhance the lives of 50 people. Organ donation can only be considered after brain death is declared by a physician, in addition to following state specific legislation.

Deciding whether or not to be an organ donor is personal and sensitive. Checking the box on your driver's license is not enough to make you an organ donor. First and foremost, family must be told of such wishes. Signing up with organizations such as [www.donatelifenet.org](http://www.donatelifenet.org) or [www.donatelifecalifornia.org](http://www.donatelifecalifornia.org), in conjunction with discussions involving family help to secure your identity as an organ donor.

The saving of a life is an unparalleled miracle often assisted by the donation of an organ.

During Shari's recovery, she created the Shari Kurzrok Second Chance for Life

Foundation to help others in life-threatening situations needing organ donations. For more information on this foundation, e-mail [vicki@cleverminds.org](mailto:vicki@cleverminds.org).

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