

I am one of the lucky few who get to go to work every day excited about the possibility of how I might change someone's life. I'm not a transplant surgeon or a nurse, and I certainly don't save lives with my own hands. The way my work affects people is more about how they think or, even more importantly, what they do. I promote organ donation and I am passionate about my work.

Years ago, on the day I received my driver's license I proudly added the orange "donor dot.". I told my parents that I supported organ donation and encouraged all my friends to do the same. At that time, I just thought it was the right thing to do. Now I understand that it is a live-saving, world-changing and powerful thing to do.

People have asked me "Why doesn't everyone share their intent to donate?" It could be that they don't know the facts, or they might be caught-up in the poorly researched, distorted transplant stories they see on television and in the movies. Or maybe they just don't understand what their gift will mean to the recipients and their families. But I do. I talk with transplant recipients every day. I know what it means to them and to the people they know and love. I know that this is the one gift that we can make that has a never-ending ripple effect.

As a society, we need to overcome the thought that only old people or people who abuse their bodies need transplants. That's not true. In fact with some diseases, people and especially children, can be fine one day, but only days later lay dying in the hospital as their families hope and pray that a donor will become available in time. These are ordinary, every day people from all walks of life. They are our grandparents, aunts, neighbors and children and any one of them could be afflicted by the types of diseases that progress to transplantation.

As I write this, 23 children await an organ transplant in Wisconsin. They are part of the almost 1,500 Wisconsinites waiting. Eighteen people in the U.S. will die today because they didn't get an organ in time. Every 13 minutes a new name is added to the national waitlist. That is two more people just in the time it takes to watch the news, or eat your lunch. For those who are more visual learners, picture this: we could fill every seat in Camp Randall Stadium and cover the entire field with the 98,000 people in the U.S. who are waiting for their gift of life.

It is human nature to not think about something until you need it, or are personally affected by it, but we can't let that be the story for organ donation. My wish is for more people to think about the need for an organ donation happening to them, or to someone they love, so maybe they'll do something now. Because now is the time to talk about being a donor, and for telling your family that you support donation. We never know when it is our turn to go, but we know right now if we are the kind of person who will share ourselves, even after our death. It is not about the numbers, or death, or even the Restoring Hope Transplant House and how it will help these people during their struggle to live. It's about being a hero, even after you're gone.

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