

Media Release



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2009 THE YEAR OF THE DECADE FOR ORGAN DONATION IN ONTARIO

*Organ donation a delicate, desperate relay race Ontario hospitals
won nearly 700 times last year – thanks to an eight-year legacy of hard work.*

Toronto, ON – Last year, nearly 700 lives were saved because of a record number of organ donations.

“2009 was a record-breaking year,” says Frank Markel, President and CEO of the Trillium Gift of Life Network (TGLN). “It was the culmination of sound planning, many years of solid progress through hard work, and the generous support of the provincial government.”

In the two short years since the Organ Donation Strategy was announced by Premier Dalton McGuinty, TGLN has implemented many of the strategy’s recommendations, including improvements to donor registration, launch of multi-faith and youth outreach campaigns, and implementation of clinical best practices to drive donation performance and changes to consent to tissue donation. And that unified effort has paid off in spades.

“Not only did Ontario achieve a record 218 organ donations, but we have decreased the number of deaths of people on the organ transplant wait list by nearly 24 per cent,” says Markel.

“The gifts given by those 218 generous deceased organ donors and their families allowed TGLN to coordinate a total of 691 life-saving organ transplants over the course of the year, a 17 per cent increase over 2008,” he adds.

The number of tissue donations over the past 12 months was unprecedented, with 1,299 tissue donors in 2009, a rise of 24 per cent from the previous year. Tissue donors provided bone grafts, heart valves, and skin for life-enhancing transplants, as well as 1,616 eyes for transplants to restore vision. Just one tissue donor can help up to 75 people through tissue donation.

“The work of the Trillium Gift of Life Network and everyone involved in organ and tissue donation in Ontario is making unbelievable differences in the lives of Ontarians and their families,” says Deb Matthews, Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. “Thank you all for your hard work and continued dedication to such an important cause.”

Markel also credits TGLN's multiple partners for the success of 2009. "The remarkable increase in the number of organ and tissue donations for transplant is only possible through dedicated cooperation from tissue banks and our healthcare partners, both at the 21 major donation hospitals and the transplant centres within the province," he says.

"Between 1999 and 2008, the average annual increase in deceased donors in Ontario nearly doubled that in the rest of the country," states Dr. John Gill, President of the Canadian Organ Replacement Register Board of Directors. "The 2009 numbers further demonstrate what can be achieved in Canada, and should be a model to drive improvement in deceased organ donation nationally."

"Success in organ and tissue donation takes an incredible team effort, and at Sunnybrook we are fortunate to have staff, physicians and leaders throughout the organization who are committed to this life-saving cause," says Dr. Barry McLellan, President and CEO, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, which lead hospitals in the Greater Toronto Area in performance improvements. "As well as our own staff, we are thankful for the partnership we have with the Trillium Gift of Life Network. Our continued collaboration and dedication to this program will save and improve countless lives across Ontario."

"I am thankful for the generosity of our donor families at a time of great distress and grateful for the support, focus and compassion of our partners," says Rabbi Reuven Bulka, of Ottawa, the Board Chair of TGLN. "And the Government of Ontario has been a tremendous ally. The astonishing success we've built to in the last decade could not have been possible without all of this assistance."

Despite the banner year and positive steps forward, more still needs to be done. Today, approximately 1,600 people in Ontario are waiting for a life-saving transplant. More lives could be saved if more people registered their decision to donate.

As of June 30, 2009, 17 per cent of eligible Ontarians over the age of 16 had registered their donation consent decision, a five per cent increase since November 30, 2008.

You can register your consent to donate your organs and tissue by visiting your local ServiceOntario Health Card Services – OHIP office or outreach centre where you renew your health card. You can also register by downloading and filling out a Gift of Life Consent Form from www.giftoflife.on.ca and mailing it to the address on the form.

Even if you've already signed your donor card, please also register your decision so that this information is accessible at the time of your death and talk to your family about your decision.

For more details on Trillium Gift of Life Network, please visit www.giftoflife.on.ca. You can also call 416-363-4001 or toll free 1-800-263-2833.

Trillium Gift of Life Network is a not-for-profit agency of the Government of Ontario and is responsible for planning, promoting, coordinating and supporting organ and tissue donation across Ontario and improving the system so that more lives can be saved.

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