Organ transplantation is the act of taking an organ from a living or deceased donor and using it to replace a dysfunctional or damaged organ in a recipient's body. The surgical techniques required for this procedure have been around for a long time, however the problem has always been rejection of the new organ by the body receiving it.

The first successful organ transplant was in 1954, and it involved a kidney between living twin brothers. After drugs that help the body not reject the new organ (immunosuppressants) were developed, a large number of transplantations occurred, all having much more success than their earlier counterparts. Now transplantations can extend a patient's life by several years with proper immunosuppressive (drug) therapy.

Some other interesting facts about organ transplantation:

- Hearts, intestines, kidneys, livers, lungs, and pancreata can all be transplanted. Other promising initial transplants have included trachea and face transplantation.

- About 81 people receive an organ transplant every day in the U.S.
• In 2008, more than 28,000 patients began new lives thanks to an organ transplant.

• Living donors can donate a kidney or parts of their liver or lung.

Matching donated organs to patients

When a potential organ donor is identified a transplant coordinator from an organ procurement organization enters medical information about the donor into the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) computer system.

The system then matches the donor’s medical characteristics with the medical information of candidates awaiting a transplant. The computer generated a ranked list of patients for each organ recovered from the donor. These “matches” are based on many things which may include:

• Level of illness

• Medical urgency of the transplant candidate

• Time spent on the waiting list for some organs

• Biological similarities between the donor and the candidates (such as organ size, blood type, and genetic makeup)

• Candidate’s availability to be transplanted immediately

Waiting for an organ – How long does it take?

Patients added to the national organ transplant waiting list may receive an organ that day, or they may wait years. Factors affecting waiting time include:

• How well the donor and recipient “match”

• How ill the patient is

• Availability of donors compared to the number of patients waiting

To gauge waiting time, UNOS publishes waiting time statistics by geographic region, sex, age, blood type and ethnicity.
Can a patient from another country receive a transplant in the U.S.?

Yes. Patients can travel from other countries to the U.S. to receive transplants. Once accepted by a transplant center, international patients receive organs based on the same policies as those that apply to U.S. citizens. These types of transplants are limited in number.

How to become an organ, eye and tissue donor

There is an urgent need for registered organ, eye and tissue donors in Ohio and across the United States. One organ donor can save eight lives, while one tissue donor can enhance the lives of more than 50 people. Unfortunately, 107,000+ men, women and children nationwide are currently waiting for life-saving organ transplants. Thousands on that waiting list live in Ohio.

To become a registered organ, eye and tissue donor, do one of the following:

- Say yes to donation at the BMV when renewing your driver license
- Register online at LifeBanc.org or call for a registration form at 216-752-5433
- Include donation in your living will
- Inform your family about your decision

For more information about organ donation, please contact:

- LifeBanc.org
- Donate Life Ohio
- Donate Life America

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