



November 2019 | A periodic e-bulletin to share results of organ donation and transplantation projects funded by the Division of Transplantation

## Getting to Yes: Improving donation discussions with family decision makers



Requesters play the critical role of discussing organ donation and obtaining consent to donate from the surviving family members of a potential donor. Two research projects funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Division of Transplantation found ways to improve requesters' confidence and efficacy during conversations with family members who are deciding whether to donate a loved one's organs.

### Strategies That Work

- Implementing flexible online training programs that requesters can fit into their busy schedules
- Offering regular training opportunities to requesters at all experience levels
- Teaching requesters to read non-verbal cues



**Temple University** researchers saw donation authorization rates increase after adapting a successful requester training program for online use. The program, Communicating Effectively about Donation (CEaD), improved the quality of donation requests and increased consent rates during previous HRSA-funded studies. Researchers hoped that making CEaD a free or low-cost interactive online program would give requesters with busy and varying work schedules more flexibility to learn evidence-based communication skills.

More than 330 requesters from 49 organ procurement organizations (OPOs) completed the online training. Novice and mid-level requesters saw improvement in the quality of their interactions with family decision makers, but to the researchers' surprise, **senior requesters saw the greatest benefits and a significant increase in authorization rates** eight weeks after completing the CEaD training.

"The study showed that we can definitely create more acceptable and productive communication patterns between donor families and requesters," says principal investigator Laura Siminoff, Ph.D. "It also demonstrated that whether a requester is junior, mid-level, or senior, training is always valuable. Almost every field in healthcare requires continuing clinical education for staff, and requesting is no different."

## **Past HRSA-funded project set the standard for requesters**

When discussing the possibility of organ donation with family decision makers, requesters use a "presumptive approach," which assumes that people will consent to donation because of the desire to help others and the potential to save lives. They focus on this motivation as a key element of the conversation they have with decision makers.

This wasn't always the case.

A HRSA-funded project in 2004 tested the presumptive approach against the standard approach at the time, which assumed that families would have concerns about the common myths surrounding donation and built the conversation around dispelling those myths. In the 2004 study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania, 46% of requesters using the presumptive approach saw a 20% or greater increase in consent rates. The presumptive approach quickly became the new standard.

## **Learning from successful requesters**

From 2013 to 2016, researchers from **The College at Brockport, SUNY** interviewed 78 requesters considered highly effective based on the percentage of families they spoke to who agreed to donate their loved ones' organs. Researchers identified 14 behaviors practiced by these successful requesters, such as using language that lets family members feel in control of their decision and providing families with periods of silence.

The researchers created a six-hour training session based on these behaviors and presented it in person at nine OPOs. Participants watched videos of requesters discussing their use of the behaviors and donor families discussing their perceptions of the request process. Participants were also asked to consider how they might implement these behaviors in their own requests.

Requesters' authorization rates were tracked before and after the training sessions, and the rates did not significantly increase during the 2.5 years they were assessed. However, OPOs could benefit from further investigating the 14 behaviors, says principal investigator Ashley Fico, Ph.D., and additional collaboration with hospitals may be needed.

For example, one of the 14 behaviors practiced by successful requesters was keeping hospital staff from sharing irrelevant information about potential donor families with requesters. Stopping

staff from sharing this information allows requesters to approach families without preconceived notions about them or their behaviors. However, it might not be enough to teach requesters this behavior without ensuring they are working in environments that support its use. OPOs and hospitals that get hospital staff to buy in to the importance of this behavior may be the key to making it work effectively, Fico says.

Learn more about these projects using the resources below.

## Want to know more?

### **Communicating Effectively about Donation: An Effectiveness and Implementation Study**

Principal Investigator: Laura A. Siminoff, Temple University, [lasiminoff@temple.edu](mailto:lasiminoff@temple.edu), 215-204-8624

Siminoff, L.A., Marshall, H.M., Dumenci, L., Bowen, G., Swaminathan, A., & Gordon, N. (2009). Communicating Effectively about Donation: An Educational Intervention to Increase Consent to Donation. *Progress in Transplant*, 19(1), 35-43.

Siminoff, L.A., Traino, H.M., & Genderson, M.W. (2015). Communicating Effectively about Organ Donation: A Randomized Trial of a Behavioral Communication Intervention to Improve Discussions about Donation. *Transplant Direct*, 1(7).

Traino, H.M., Siminoff, L.A. (2016). Keep It Going: Maintaining Health Conversations Using Relational and Instrumental Approaches. *Health Communication*, 31(3), 308-319.

### **Effects of a Positive Deviance Intervention to Enhance Familial Authorization to Organ Donation**

Principal Investigator: Ashley E. Fico, The College at Brockport—State University of New York, [afico@brockport.edu](mailto:afico@brockport.edu), 585-395-5091

Fico, A.E., Feeley, T.H., Wang, H., & Hakim, S. (2019). Communicating with families about organ donation: Using positive deviance to improve authorization rates. In A. Singhal (Ed.), *Positive Deviance: A New Paradigm for Social Change*. Washington, DC: Sage Publications.

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