

SASOHN supports the Organ Donor Foundation

Each year SASOHN endeavours to support an initiative that benefits communities. In 2011 we have chosen to support the Organ Donor Foundation. The Foundation receives no Government funding and through donations succeeds in driving awareness and education campaigns, which educate the public and medical fraternity about organ donation and transplantation. Without these efforts many potential donors would be lost. Below is the story of a nurse who herself

has benefited from organ donation. It is SASOHNs request that all practitioners use the month of August to increase the awareness of the need for organ donation as it is National Organ Donor Awareness month. Do not hesitate to contact the Foundation who will assist you in this initiative.

Karen Michell
SASOHN President

My failing kidneys made me an international sport star

As a qualified dialysis and transplant nurse, Heilie Uys thought she knew everything about organ transplants. Despite that knowledge, nothing could have prepared her for the moment when she realised just how much a transplant transforms a patient's life. This is her story.

NURSING A PASSION

I knew from day one that nursing was my true calling. I also realised early on that high-tech nursing would be my final destination. The more machines and pipes, the better I felt. As a Critical Care nurse, we saw the reality of brain stem death, which made me feel unsympathetic towards transplant coordinators. We called them vultures whenever they visited our unit. I later specialised in working with renal failure patients. My attitude towards transplant coordinators changed when I was in charge of a haemodialysis unit. Now we were partners. I could see how organ donation and transplantation was the most important way of saving the lives of patients with chronic renal failure. I had become a vulture.

THE NURSE BECOMES THE PATIENT

I moved into nursing education and established Certificate and Diploma programmes in Nephrology Nursing at the former Rand Afrikaans University and University of Port Elizabeth. I lectured on all aspects of chronic kidney disease and renal replacement therapy, including how patients should feel and how they should adapt to their illness. Transplant Coordinators and the Organ Donor Foundation joined me at lectures and nephrology congresses.

During 1994 I contracted systemic vasculitis, or Wegener's Disease or Wegener's Granulomatosis. The condition destroyed my sinuses, affected my lungs and I suffered renal failure. It was ironic that I spent my days lecturing about dialysis while at night I had to dialyse myself with automated peritoneal dialysis. Dialysis became real: a machine in the

Heilie Uys, RN, CNN, PhD



Heilie and Willie Uys

bedroom, changed diet, emotional turmoil and restrictions on the family. For the first time I knew exactly how a dialysis patient feels.

TRANSFORMATION FROM TRANSPLANTATION

We don't realise the full impact of the expression "when the call comes" until it does. Mine came at 08:40 on Saturday 13th March 2004. I felt totally unprepared, like a pregnant woman going into a labour ward without her suitcase. I had to be in Cape Town by 13:00. Living in Cape St. Francis, it seemed impossible to get there in time. Fortunately my friend, Roy Liebenberg, has a small plane. With closed eyes and a lot of prayer, we reached Cape Town by 12:30.

The rest, as they say, is history. I had been on dialysis



SATSA Team 2009 Australia

for three years, three months and three days. The operation started at 3:00pm on 13 March. I was discharged on 23 March. I wondered what all the threes could mean. A friend told me to read Jeremiah 33:3: "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know".

As a qualified dialysis and transplant nurse, I thought I knew everything about nephrology nursing. It was only after the transplant that I knew what a transplantation patient experiences.

CELEBRATING A NEW LIFE

While continuing to teach and promote organ donation, I felt that I had to celebrate my new life with more passion. I joined what is now known as the South African Transplant Sports Association (SATSA) and qualified to participate in the World Transplant Games in Canada (2005), in Thailand (2007) and Australia (2009). What an overwhelming experience to be one of 1500 transplantees from all over the world competing in good spirit and celebrating life!

I thank the Lord for the strength, good health and opportunity to give thanks to the donor and family. Their commitment to become organ donors changed my life. For most dialysis patients, transplantation is the only route to a renewed life. I realised the importance of organ donation and the work of the Organ Donor Foundation (ODF). I want to pay tribute to the wonderful, committed people of the ODF who make it their life goal to ensure that these miracles happen.

To contact the Organ Donor Foundation, please call them toll-free on 0800 22 66 11 or visit their website www.odf.org.za. For more information about the South African Transplant Sports Association visit www.transplantsports.org.za.

Save lives. Be an Organ donor!



Peritoneal dialysis