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In Their Last Hour They Gave a Lifetime

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# In Their Last Hour They Gave a Lifetime

Lisa Stocks, RN, MSN, FNP



An organ procurement organization (OPO) is the final link at the end of a person's life and first link in the process of saving the life of someone waiting on the organ transplant list. As the federally designated organ procurement agency for San Diego and Imperial counties and one of only 58 OPOs in the United States, Lifesharing has a mission - to coordinate the recovery of organs for transplant, to provide support for the donor's family, and to find recipients for the donated organs. Staff members at Lifesharing play a vital role in the complex process of providing lifesaving organs to needy recipients, but they also guide hospital staff through the process of ensuring that every family has the opportunity to have a living memorial of their lost loved one through organ and tissue donation.

Six years ago, Lifesharing began a journey of performance improvement. We knew that we could save more lives if we had more organs for transplant. We started by assessing past performance with the goal of increasing the numbers of available organs. We implemented procedures to increase hospital awareness of the donation process so that we would receive notification of

potential donors. We also ensured that our nurses could respond to every hospital in San Diego County within 2 hours of initial notification. We worked with the staff at our donor hospitals to ensure that every family was given the opportunity to donate. We then went on to offer out all acceptable organs for transplant. We have been very successful, increased organ donation dramatically and in 2009 are projected to facilitate more transplants than ever. By providing extensive support to the local hospitals, we have become one of the highest functioning OPOs in the United States. While the average consent rate in the U.S. is 65%, Lifesharing has an 86% consent rate and overall donation rates exceeding 80%. This is just the beginning as we strive to maintain or exceed our prior successes.

Who can become a donor? An organ donor can be anyone up to 80 years of age or younger who has sustained a brain injury which they cannot survive. Once brain death has been declared by two physicians, a Lifesharing family services staff member and a nurse coordinator will approach the family



**Lisa Stocks, Executive Director**  
**Lifesharing: A Donate Life Organization**

to obtain consent for transplant of the organs. Once consent has been obtained, the clinical staff take over medical management of the patient in order to maximize function of all the organs. They implement specialized physiologic management techniques to improve lung and heart function,



**Lifesharing team meeting**



By Sharon Ross  
Lifesharing Community Outreach Manager

Lifesharing's staff embraces a very challenging, very rewarding role – a delicate balance of supporting donor families while also representing people on the national organ waiting list. At 86%, Lifesharing's consent rate is one of the highest in the nation because team members understand donation not only saves lives, but helps their donor families heal.



One such bittersweet day involved the death of a young son and the potential lifetime salvaged for another son. Seventeen-year-old Sam McCrow was vacationing in San Diego with his family. As the avid surfer stepped out of the water, he collapsed. Despite every effort to save his life at UCSD Medical Center, the Vancouver high school student died from a brain aneurysm.

Sam



Stunned by their loss, his family did something heroic. In the midst of their tragedy, they said yes to donation. The day Sam McCrow lost his life, he saved four lives, including 3-year-old Xavier McLeod - a little boy who had been waiting for a kidney since he was 18 months old.

Separated by 1000 miles, Lifesharing helped the two families meet by phone on the first anniversary of Sam's death. The day Xavier now celebrates as his 're-birthday.' The day he received his precious second chance at life.

Today Sam's and Xavier's moms are Facebook friends. They exchange stories, laugh together and sometimes cry together. And they share pictures like Xavier's first day at kindergarten

with his brand new Spiderman backpack. It was a day his family thought might never happen. No dialysis. No special diets. No pain nor fear. All thanks to Xavier's hero Sam.

Xavier

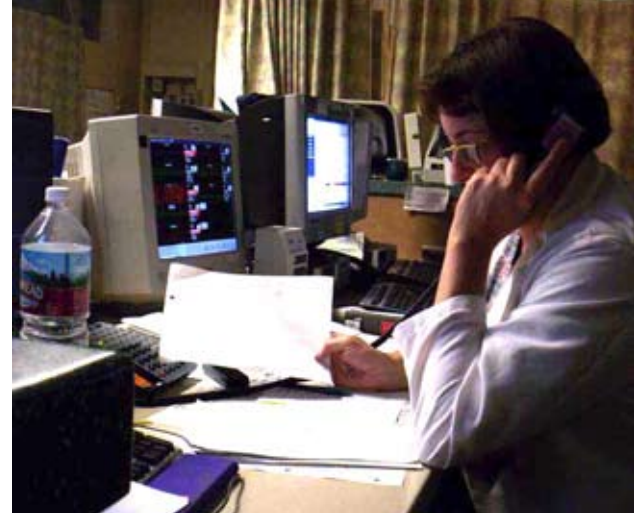
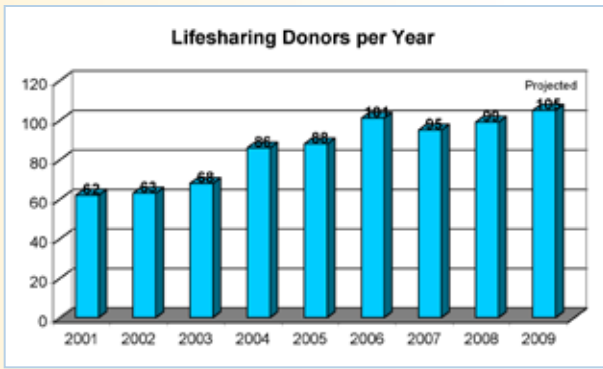
**Photos from top to bottom: Donor coordinator Becky Dodd-Sullivan; donor mom Jasmine McCrow and recipient mom Valerie James who met recently at Lifesharing's Symphony of Life, an annual symposium for healthcare professionals; Jasmine hugs Lifesharing Surgical Coordinator Billy Snyder, who coordinated Sam's recovery. Like her son, Billy also is a surfer.**



improve urine output and electrolyte levels, in an attempt to prepare all organs for transplant. Organ procurement coordinators are highly trained specialists who understand that the long hours they spend in optimizing organ function will result in lives saved when the organs are transplanted.

An important part of the process is to match the donor with potential recipients based on blood type, size, severity of illness, and geographic proximity. Organs from a given donor may be designated for multiple transplant centers. Procuring surgeons from each center accepting an organ arrive at the donor hospital in preparation for organ recovery. In the

donor operating suite the Lifesharing surgical coordinators manage the organ recovery to ensure that all possible organs are taken and packaged appropriately for transport. They also ensure that the organs arrive quickly and safely at their final destinations. This process can take up to three days! A successful transplant is an important goal, but the Lifesharing staff also feel a deep responsibility to the donor families. Donor families are provided with a two year follow up program of letters, support, gatherings, and activities designed to acknowledge their grieving, as well as their generous gift. Additionally, Lifesharing brings donor families and transplant recipients together to participate



Sandy Leyden working up a donor for transplant.

in community awareness programs throughout the year. They visit schools, churches, and hospitals and other community venues to share their stories. These programs have been successful in increasing the number of people who say “yes” to donation.

All members of the Lifesharing staff are proud to honor our donor families, and their loved ones – the donors themselves - for their gift of organ donation. Each story is heart breaking because it involves the tragic loss of a beloved family member or friend. These stories, and the people

who tell them, reach the hearts of the Lifesharing staff. The coordinators, family service specialists, and surgical staff give, not only of their time and energy, but a piece of themselves as they pursue organs for transplant. They, along with the donor families, have the satisfaction of knowing that they have given someone the blessing of renewed health and a chance for a longer life. As for the donors, we will never forget that

*In their last hour they gave a lifetime.*



Transplant patients held a bake sale to raise money for the Transplant Olympics.