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# Why Organ Procurement Coordination?

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# Lifes

I think every nurse at Lifesharing has their own story on why they became an Organ Procurement Coordinator (OPC). It could have been a specific organ donation case they were a part of as an ICU nurse, a recipient they cared for, or learning more about the donation process and role of the Procurement Coordinator that sparked their interest. Our director, Lisa Stocks, started at Lifesharing as a Procurement Coordinator. Her account of what brought her to a career in donation demonstrates her passion for the industry:

“During college I volunteered in a CTICU at UMC in Tucson, Arizona. My dream was to be an ICU nurse in a unit that specialized in the care of patient status post CABG, valve replacement, heart transplants as well as the new and exciting world of ventricular assist devices and Total Artificial Hearts. The unit was high energy and patients were either in and out very quickly or, like some who had received cardiac device implants, stayed for months. Luckily, I was accepted into the New Grad program in this very unit and enjoyed the fast paced learning environment. One night after at the end of a double shift taking care of a 40 yo man on a Total Artificial heart, one of the cardiology Fellows mentioned that they needed an extra set of hands during an organ recovery - would I be interested? Of course, I was very interested because the heart was for my patient. We immediately hopped in helicopter and then a Lear jet and flew to Spokane Washington. After another

helicopter to the top of a very high hospital, I was able to scrub in and help remove the heart from the donor.

I had many questions about the donor, but there were very few answers. Why did his family donate? Would they know how sick the recipient was? Would they know anything about the four recipients? At the time, information wasn't shared between the donor and recipient as easily as it is now. After the heart was removed, we retraced our flights, the heart was transplanted and the recipient was safely taken off the Total Artificial Heart. Two days later I was able to escort his two small children to his bedside - a true miracle. Suddenly, it seemed more important to me to help this donation process happen and save more lives. I quickly pursued a career as a Procurement Coordinator. Working with the donor families and helping save lives while making a memorial to their loved one is a special and rewarding career.”

The job description of a Procurement Coordinator involves providing on-site evaluations of potential organ donors, gaining consent and supporting families during the consent and donation process, managing the donor in the ICU to assure viability of the organs, locating recipients and coordinating procuring surgeons for each transplantable organ. Since donor coordination takes place within a specialty area a Procurement Coordinator acts as a liaison with hospital personnel, ICU staff, and physicians to develop relationships



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*What do you say to a family that just selflessly acted to help others in a time that they are grieving a huge loss to their family? There was no Policy and Procedure for this, no competency to explain the “right thing to say”.*

and provide educational programs to facilitate the organ donation process.

In the State of California, the legal time of death occurs when an individual is declared brain dead by two attending physicians from the hospital. If the patient is eligible for donation and consent is obtained, the Procurement Coordinator can then manage the care for the patient until time of procurement. Many of these patients are complicated by biochemical cascades ensuing brain death, comorbidities, trauma, and acute disease processes. Once care is assumed, routine labs are ordered to monitor organ function, ventilator settings are evaluated to optimize oxygenation, and medications are started to support hemodynamic stability and catecholamine responses to brain death. Although the autonomy is rewarding, it can be challenging to coordinate the donor management, organ allocation and the overall orchestration that coincides with bringing a donor to the OR.

Two years nursing experience in the ICU is a prerequisite for the position. A new coordinator will spend the first several months in an intensive on-the-job training to develop proficiency in the unique skills needed, much like a residency

program in medical school. Our shifts are 24 hours, and a new coordinator must have enough flexibility to be available for cases that arises during their training period and the ability to accommodate the long work weeks. After several years as a Procurement Coordinator, we are encouraged to study and test with the American Board of Transplant Certification to become a Certified Procurement Transplant Coordinator (CPTC).

Lifesharing must meet regulatory guidelines set by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations (AOPO), and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). Policies and Procedures for managing donors and family interactions are created by Lifesharing based on what these regulatory organizations set for standards. Our office has a quality assurance administration that helps keep us compliant with regulations and prepared for visits from our accreditors.

At the end of the day, I am always amazed by the strength and gratitude of the families I work with. On my first case as a Procurement Coordinator, I accompanied a family back to the lobby after they said their good-byes to their loved one at the operating

doors. Arriving at the lobby, I realized that I was not prepared for this part of the job. What do you say to a family that just selflessly acted to help others in a time that they are grieving a huge loss to their family? There was no Policy and Procedure for this, no competency to explain the “right thing to say”. I didn’t say anything, I just hugged them. They thanked me for everything we did to make donation possible. This was the first of many thanks I have received from families.

When I think of all the people that donation touches, I am honored to be a part of the process. Not only does it help donor families see a little silver lining in a black cloud, but gives life to those on the waiting list, life to spend with their families and to do the things that would not be possible without this very special gift.