



Dr. Clive Callender

EDUCATION IS KEY TO INCREASING ORGAN AND BLOOD DONORSHIP

BY OTESA MIDDLETON MILES

James Brincefield's kidneys suddenly stopped working.

Now, more than a dozen years later, Brincefield still doesn't know what made his kidneys shut down, but he does know why he's still around to talk about it. On Feb. 25, 1998, he received a kidney transplant at Howard University Hospital.

"Once I received the transplant, everything started working again," he says.

Brincefield, who will be 60 in August, now visits minority communities to underscore the importance of organ donation. "Organ donation does work," he tells people. "You're extending someone's life so that he or she can be a more productive person in society. It's something I strongly believe in, of course."

Dr. Clive Callender, founder and director of Howard University Hospital's transplant center, says that many people are unaware of the need for organ donors in minority communities. "African Americans make up 13

percent of the population, yet are 35 percent of the population on dialysis and awaiting transplantation," he says.

African Americans also make up an even greater number—almost half—of people awaiting a kidney transplant. The higher incidence of diabetes and high blood pressure in African Americans has led to the increased need for transplants, Callender says. This led him to found MOTTEP, the Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program, in the early 1990s. The organization, in 10 sites nationwide, has helped boost the numbers of minorities donating organs and tissue.

"When we started, 15 percent of donors were minorities," says Callender, who established the transplant center at Howard University Hospital in 1973. Between 1988 and 2008, 251 organ transplants were conducted at the Hospital. "Now, we represent 30 percent of donors. We've doubled the minority donation rate."

National donor data from 2007 to 2008 shows that 14,202

people in the U.S. donated organs. Of those, 9,668 donors were White, 2,006 were Black, 1,954 were Hispanic, 425 were Asian, 68 were American Indian/Alaska Native, 26 were Pacific Islander and 55 were multiracial.

“The problem isn’t that we’re not donating, but that we’re disproportionately affected by hypertension and diabetes,” says Callender, who performed a kidney transplant in February on Washington, D.C., city councilmember and former mayor Marion Barry.

In May, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing, more than 102,000 people in the U.S. awaited an organ transplant. Most people on the transplant list—some 79,000—were in need of a kidney. High blood pressure and diabetes are the underlying causes for half of those on the list.

TACKLING MISPERCEPTIONS

Callender says common misperceptions often deter African Americans from donating organs. Concern about whether an individual’s religion supports organ donation is one of the main issues raised. “It is in giving that you receive,” he says, explaining that donating an organ is compatible with many religious beliefs.

Another obstacle has been overcoming fears in the African-American community of being used as “guinea pigs,” a result of distrust of the health care system.

Callender also says some potential donors are hesitant to offer their organs for fear that doctors will be more interested in harvesting their organs than saving their lives. However, the transplant team that obtains donated organs aren’t involved until a person is pronounced dead.

A STRONG NEED FOR BLOOD DONORSHIP, TOO

Angela Mason, the community outreach coordinator at Howard University’s Department of Pediatrics and Child Health, District of Columbia Greater Access to Pediatric Sickle Cell Disease, says there is also a great need for blood donations. “There is a shortage, particularly within the African-American community,” Mason says.

Every two seconds someone in the U.S. needs blood, which is used for various reasons including treating accident victims, people undergoing cancer treatment, certain surgeries, bone marrow transplants and those

who have leukemia. However, just 5 percent of those eligible to donate blood do so, according to the American Red Cross.

“African Americans are a closer match for those who have sickle cell, which can require blood transfusions every three to six weeks,” Mason says.

Kim Lee is one of the 70,000 people in the U.S. with sickle cell anemia. The blood disease occurs in approximately one in 500 African-American births. Lee, 42, has had more than 20 blood transfusions at the Hospital in the past two decades. The most recent transfusion was earlier this year. “I’ve talked to my family about donating blood,” says Lee, who is now looking for a match so she can receive a bone marrow transplant.

TIME FOR ACTION

Brincefield calls himself “very blessed” after waiting on the transplant list for almost three years. Sadly, some awaiting transplants don’t receive a donated organ in time. According to federal statistics on organ donations, every day roughly 77 people receive an organ transplant. But because of a shortage of organs, 19 people die each day while awaiting a transplant.

“Some people don’t want to donate because of lack of education and fear,” Brincefield says. “We need to educate more people.” ✓

WAYS TO DONATE

- 1 Tell your family. Let your next of kin know your wishes to donate your organs and tissue.
- 2 Sign your donor card, available when you obtain or renew your driver’s license.
- 3 Register online. For Washington, D.C., residents, go to www.donatelifedc.org. For all other states, visit www.organdonor.gov/donor/index.htm.
- 4 For more information, visit www.nationalmottep.org.
- 5 To donate blood, attend a blood drive or call **1-800-GIVEBLOOD**.

National Minority Organ Donor Awareness Day is Aug. 1.

September is National Sickle Cell Month.
On Sept. 16, the American Red Cross Mobile Unit will be collecting blood in the Front Plaza at Howard University Hospital from 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.