

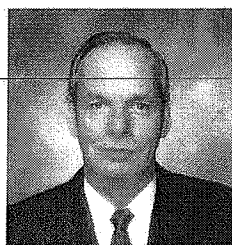
New C/ME Agreement Aims to Increase Donation

Gift of Hope and the Illinois Coroners and Medical Examiners Association (ICMEA) have forged an agreement designed to improve communication and encourage greater cooperation among coroners/medical examiners (C/MEs) and organ and tissue procurement organizations like Gift of Hope. The new agreement takes the form of a "memorandum of understanding" (MOU) that charts a course for C/MEs and Gift of Hope to follow to maximize the recovery of organs and tissue used for transplants.

"About 15 C/ME refusals for organ donation occur each year in Illinois, resulting in the loss of approximately 60 lifesaving organs for transplant," said Arnitha Lim, RN, CTBS, Director of Tissue Recovery Services for Gift of Hope. "For tissue donation, the numbers are even more significant. We believe this agreement will reduce those numbers and make more lifesaving and life-enhancing organs and tissue available to those in need. Our goal is a 100 percent release rate on all C/ME cases."

The MOU originally was proposed as state legislation in 2010 and would have required C/MEs to perform certain donation-related duties by law. Responding to a request by the ICMEA Board of Directors, Gift of Hope agreed to pull the legislation and take a more cooperative MOU approach while still meeting the original legislation's goals. "We felt the intent of the legislation—to get C/MEs to support the donation process—could be better achieved if we made a good-faith effort to compromise on the medium used to get the message across," Lim explained. "So we opted for the MOU approach to develop a more collaborative working relationship and improve C/MEs' understanding of our needs."

The ICMEA endorsed that approach. "An atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration between coroners and medical examiners and organ procurement organizations such as



The agreement between Gift of Hope and ICMEA allows each organization to carry out its given mission, said ICMEA President Steve Nonn.

Gift of Hope is desired so that each party can carry out its given mission," said ICMEA President Steve Nonn. "Legislation, litigation or mandate cannot create the spirit, desire and willingness for these two parties—each with a noble and just purpose—to come together to benefit a life in the future and honor the wishes of a life left behind."

C/MEs' main point of contention in donation cases has been that organ and tissue recovery can impede their ability to investigate a death or ensure a conviction. But that's a misperception, Lim said. "There is no documented case in Illinois or on a national level that organ donation has interfered with a criminal investigation or prevented a conviction," she explained. "It's important to note that the MOU does not prohibit C/MEs from denying donation. They retain that right if they believe the recovery process would interfere with their work. It requires them only to work cooperatively with us to ensure that no opportunity for donation is missed."

"Cooperation" is the operative word throughout the MOU's provisions. For example, the document includes a requirement that Gift of Hope provide ongoing educational seminars for C/MEs to promote better communication and increase their awareness of the benefits of organ and tissue donation. And C/MEs must make a concerted effort to allow for timely organ and tissue recoveries in certain cases involving deceased donors that fall under their jurisdiction. Visit GiftofHope.org to download a complete copy of the MOU.

Highlights of the Gift of Hope/ICMEA Agreement

Gift of Hope Responsibilities

- Provide ongoing donation educational seminars for C/MEs
- Obtain C/ME consent before performing recoveries on cases awaiting post-mortem examinations by C/MEs
- Provide C/MEs with timely donor information needed to perform death investigation duties
- Reimburse C/MEs for additional costs incurred to participate in the organ and tissue recovery process

C/ME Responsibilities

- Permit timely organ and tissue recoveries in cases under their jurisdiction when possible
- Make timely referrals to Gift of Hope and provide the information necessary to maximize donation opportunities
- Provide Gift of Hope with specific reasons when a case under C/ME jurisdiction cannot be released for donation
- Facilitate the transportation of a donor to Gift of Hope's in-house recovery suite when possible