

Don't Just Leave a Will, Leave a Vision!

A casual conversation continued among friends over the weekend. They were talking, rather casually, about what they would like to do to their body and organs after they die. While one had decided on donating his body to science, the girl sitting opposite him thought to donate her organs to those in need of them is a better good. A morbid yet casual discussion among a group of youngsters but it really makes you think. What would you do? Do you know what and how to do it?

For most of us, the answer to this would be a 'No!' Though organ donation is promoted and people are encouraged to do so, people are still unaware of the procedure or the formalities. We all appreciate and feel pride in someone who donated their eyes, heart, liver or kidneys before they passed on, but we rarely think about what we would do. To dispel this ignorance among people, including the medical community, Dr. Paresh Savla spreads awareness about eye donation and also encourages his fellow practitioners to promote it among their patients. As a kid, he used to see blind people and think of how he can help them. As he grew up, he began helping them in small ways like assisting them to cross the street or run errands for them. After graduating with a medical degree, Dr Savla decided that one way to help blind people see light was to encourage eye donation. This way he created his own path and began walking on it. He got involved in the activities of the eye bank and subsequently got the required training for removing the eyes of the deceased who had pledged to donate theirs. Until today, he has performed over 400 surgeries and helped hundreds of people see this wonderful world.

Impressed with Dr Savla and his noble mission, we asked him a few questions about his campaign. He enlightened us with some interesting facts and information we should all remember,

especially when we belong to the healthcare community.

▪ *Who can be eye donors?*

Anyone and everyone! It's true. Cataract, poor eyesight and age do not prohibit you from becoming a donor. Prospective donors should indicate their intention on donor cards and driver's licenses. One very important thing you can do is express your wish to donate your eyes to your kin to make sure they are carried out. So, all you need to do to bequeath your eyes is take a simple pledge to donate your eyes after death.

▪ *What if someone died without bequeathing their eyes? Can the next of kin consent to a donation if the deceased person has not signed an eye donation form?*

Yes! They can.

▪ *Whom should we contact to donate eyes?*

Eyes need to be removed within six hours after death and so it is important to get in touch with your nearest eye bank at the earliest. The eye bank team which would have a trained technician or a registered medical practitioner would remove the eyes after taking consent on a printed form and also take a blood sample.

▪ *How can the kin or family of the deceased ensure the eyes are in good condition till the eye bank officials arrive?*

The eyes should be kept closed and moist by sprinkling water on them or pieces of cotton wool soaked in water can be placed on both the eyes so that the cornea does not become dry. If possible, apply antibiotic eye drops periodically in the deceased's eyes to reduce the chance of any infection. Fans and Air Conditioner (if available) need to be switched off to

prevent drying of the cornea. Raise the head of the deceased by about six inches, if possible, to reduce the chances of bleeding at the time of removal of the eye. Keep 2 copies of the death certificate ready (if available). Once the eyes have been removed, the eyelids will be stitched together and there will be no visible sign of the eyes having been removed. The entire process is completed within 10-15 mins.

▪ *Once donated, how will the eyes be used?*

The front, clear and transparent tissue of the eye called as the cornea, is used to restore vision to a corneal blind person. The other portions of the eye are used for research and training purposes to develop cures for some common eye diseases.

▪ *A lot of families are concerned about the delay in funeral arrangements due to this procedure. Does the process affect the arrangements?*

No, it has to be performed within six hours and leaves no disfigurement that will interfere with common funeral practices.

▪ *Another concern most people have is 'How do I ensure that the eyes so donated would not be misused'?*

Eye Banks are covered under Transplantation of Human Organs Act 1994. It is a criminal offence to buy or sell organs. The Government issues a certificate of registration to eye banks and has a provision to inspect them regularly. And, in case a complaint is filed against any eye bank, the government can take legal action.

▪ *Will the quality of medical care be affected if one is known to be a Donor?*

Absolutely not. Strict laws protect the potential donor.

Legal guidelines must be followed before death can be certified. A physician certifying a patient's death cannot be in any way involved with eye procurement or with the transplant.

- ***Once the eyes have been donated and the cornea extracted, how long can it be stored?***

The Eye-Bank does keep a 'bank' of tissue in its laboratory. Fortunately, corneal tissue can be stored up to 14 days before it must be used for transplant. However, since the demand for ocular tissue is high, most donor tissues are distributed within 3 to four days after its arrival.

- ***Can a person who is blind due to retinal or optic nerve disease or past eye surgery donate his eyes?***

Yes, provided the cornea of the donor is clear.

- ***Now we know who can donate their eyes. But, who cannot donate their eyes?***

All potential donors are carefully screened for medical suitability and high-risk factors. HIV, Hepatitis B and syphilis tests are done before any tissue is released for surgery. However, in certain cases like death due to an unknown cause, active meningitis or encephalitis, active viral hepatitis, active miliary tuberculosis or tubercular meningitis, Hepatitis B surface antigen positive donors, leukaemia, active Lymphoma to name a few.

Would you like to help? Well, sure you can. You can help by:

- By deciding to donate eyes, and giving someone the most precious gift of sight.
- By encouraging your family members to donate.
- Being a member of the eye donation centre

- Calling the nearest eye bank immediately when a death occurs in the family
- Motivating friends and relatives of the deceased to donate eyes

Join us and Dr Paresh Savla and help ***Lighten the Blind Eyes –
Brighten the Blind Lives!***