



જેદવાન ધાન



Raising awareness of organ and
tissue donation within the
Australian Indian Community



Jeevan Dhan

NSW Indian Welfare Association (IWA) is a not-for-profit organisation set up to promote educational, recreational and health information services for the welfare of the Australian Indian Community. Raising awareness of the benefits of organ and tissue donation within the Australian Indian community is an important aspect of community welfare. With a grant from the Organ and Tissue Authority, IWA's Jeevan Dhan project aims to promote awareness of organ and tissue donation within the Indian community through community events and articles in the local Indian papers.

What is organ donation?

Organ donation is a life-saving and life-transforming medical process. Organs and/or tissue are removed from a donor and transplanted into someone who is very ill or dying from organ failure. Most organ donation occurs when the donor dies. In some cases living donors may give one of their kidneys or part of their liver to a recipient.

One organ and tissue donor can save or enhance the lives of ten or more people. For example:

- a lung transplant can save the life of a child
- a kidney transplant can mean a person no longer needs to spend several hours, several times a week, hooked up to a dialysis machine, and
- a corneal transplant can give the gift of sight.

Organ and tissue donations happen quickly after the person dies. The donor's body is always treated with dignity and respect.

Which organs can be donated?

In Australia, people can donate the following:

- **Organs** – including kidneys, heart, lungs, liver and pancreas
- **Tissue** – including heart valves, bone tissue, skin, eye and pancreas tissue.



Organ donation in India

Compiled by Mallika Ganesan, a member of IWA

India is promoting organ donation in a big way. On March 8, 2011 a large number of women from the city of Ahmedabad in the west of India celebrated International Women's Day by promising to donate their organs to save lives. Shatayu, a non-government organisation (shatayu.org.in), has taken a lead in promoting organ donation in India. Shatayu organised a whole day event recently where as many as 1600 people took the pledge for multi-organ donation of which 900 were women.

There is wide spread media coverage of organ donation in India such as this story in *The Indian Express*, January 29, 2009:

An 82-year-old woman has become one of the oldest organ donors in the country. Gyanant Kaur's family donated her eyes and liver on Wednesday — the liver gave new life to the father of a serving army officer; and the eyes have benefited two visually handicapped persons.

Widow of late Honorary Lieutenant Tarlok Singh, Kaur was brought to the Army Hospital in Dhaula Kuan on January 26 after she slipped on the bathroom floor of her house and sustained a head injury.

“She had internal bleeding and was pronounced brain dead yesterday,” retired Colonel Jaspal Singh, her eldest son, said. “Since she was brain dead, we thought it was best to donate her organs. Though we did not know about the option of organ donation, we were happy to help those in need.”

The hospital authorities approached the family members to donate organs, and they agreed.



India celebrated its first Organ Donation Day in November 2010. Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad said there was need to create greater awareness among the people regarding organ donation. This could save millions of lives.

“The awareness of organ donation in India is very high.”

A country-wide system of organ donation was also launched on the occasion. New transplant facilities and strengthening of existing units are major highlights of this program. The program also aims at creating a nationwide organ donation card and promotes donor registration through driving licences.

Around 100,000 Indians suffer from corneal blindness and are awaiting corneal transplantation. Against this requirement only 38,000 donor corneas have been available. However, this is a great start from a low base.

About 150,000 people are diagnosed with kidney failure in India every year, out of which only about 5,000 are able to get kidneys for transplantation.

“It is paradoxical that a country like ours with a billion-plus population should have shortage of organs for transplantation,” the Health Minister said, pointing out that thousands of people in India did not even reach the treatment stage like dialysis because of the high costs involved.

However, this situation is changing very rapidly. The awareness of organ donation in India is very high. Tamil Nadu, one of the southern states, has one of the leading organ donation programs in India. This has been achieved by years of sustained social work by campaigners.

The Hindu, November 29, 2010





The Hindu religious perspective

By Sri Vasudevacharya

Organ donation has become an important topic over the last few years. Where does the Hindu religion stand on this issue? As far as I am aware, the Hindu religion does not specifically address this issue, since the technology that makes organ and tissue donation possible is of very recent origin, the topic could not have been specifically discussed in the shastras (scriptures).

Therefore, we must look to the guiding spirit behind the words of the shastras. We can, in this way, find sufficient support to say that organ and tissue donation is not only permissible by followers of the Hindu religion, but it is an act that brings merit (punya) to the donor. In the Bhagavad Gita, for example, we find that among the ethical and social values upon which Lord Krishna bestows considerable attention is the importance of “giving” or donation (dana). In the eighteenth chapter, He emphatically says:

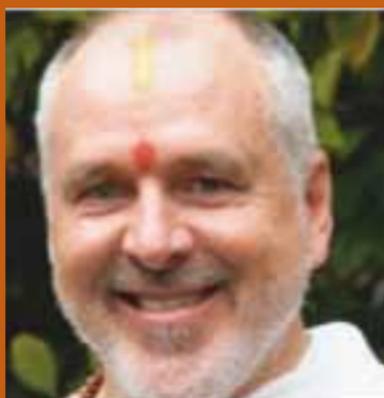
Actions consisting of acts of worship (yajna), acts of giving (dana) and undertaking religious disciplines (tapas) should not be abandoned. They are most certainly to be performed. Worship, acts involving giving and the undertaking of religious disciplines are considered by the wise to be purifying to oneself. But even these actions must be done without attachment either to the action itself or to its result. This, Arjuna, is My final, considered position. (18.5-6)

Lord Krishna clearly says that acts of charity remain a life-long obligation. He further says that they are purifying to the giver and He says that such acts should be done without attachment to the action or to its result, i.e., they should be done in the spirit of making an offering to the Lord without seeking any selfish motive. Such verses as these clearly bring out the importance of dana, of giving.

Giving, or making donations, can be of various kinds. For example, annadana is well known, where food is given to hungry persons. This is considered a great dana. There is also dana that involves making donations of money to assist others who are in need. Giving knowledge, through teaching, is another type of dana. Since Lord Krishna places us under the obligation to bestow upon others some portion of what one has, we are in a position to say that the

act of bestowing sight by donating one's eyes or some other useful organ or tissue must be considered a true act of giving. Surely helping others to enjoy a better quality of life, or even in assisting them to live at all, by donating one or more of one's organs after one's passing, ought to be considered a most beneficial gift and, if it is done in the spirit of making an offering to the Lord, it would become a true religious act.

We are reminded in this context of the story of the sage Dadhici, who voluntarily gave up his life so that Indra could make use of his backbone, which Indra fashioned into a weapon to defeat the asura, Vrtra. If Dadhici can give his bones as an act of self-sacrifice for social welfare, there can be no problem with donating one's organs after death for the benefit of other people. The donation of one's organs is encouraged within the Hindu religion because it is an act of giving (dana) for the benefit of others.



Sri Vasudevacharya

(previously Dr Michael Comans) is a senior disciple of Sri Swami Dayananda Saraswati, one of the great contemporary teachers of Advaita Vedanta. Sri Vasudevacharya studied under Swami Dayananda in a traditional manner from 1980 until 1983, firstly at the Chinmaya Mission Ashram, Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, in Piercy, California, and later in India at Rishikesh. He returned to Sydney, Australia, in 1983 and completed his Doctorate in Classical Indian Philosophy at the Australian National University in 1987. He then served as a faculty member in the Department of Indian Studies at the University of Sydney. In 1995, he left university teaching to concentrate on the study and teaching of Vedanta. In 1998 he received diksha from his guru with the name Vasudevacharya. Since then he has been teaching the Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads full-time to the general public.



South Asian religions and organ donation

Compiled by Cheenu Srinivasan, a member of IWA

South Asia is recognised as the cradle of many religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. In addition, there are streams of religious practices that have their roots in the philosophical underpinnings of the above religions.

Notwithstanding the diversity of religious and philosophical viewpoints, rituals and daily living, there runs a common thread across our religions. They are all based on the freedom of the individual to discern one's 'dharma'- the way to live. 'Daan', the Sanskrit word for selfless giving, lies at the core of one's dharma.

In the list of the ten Niyamas (virtuous acts), Daan comes third. One may choose to give according to one's own disposition and propensity to help others in need. According to The Manusmriti, "Of all the things that it is possible to donate, to donate your own body is infinitely more worthwhile."

There are many other references that support the concept of donation in Hindu scriptures. Foremost that people easily relate to is that of Lord Ganesha with his elephant head!

In a recent interview, world renowned teacher of Vedanta, Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswathi says: "... the healthy parts can be donated after death. We have been writing about this whenever the occasion arises."

The Sikh philosophy and teachings also places great emphasis on the importance of giving and putting others before oneself.

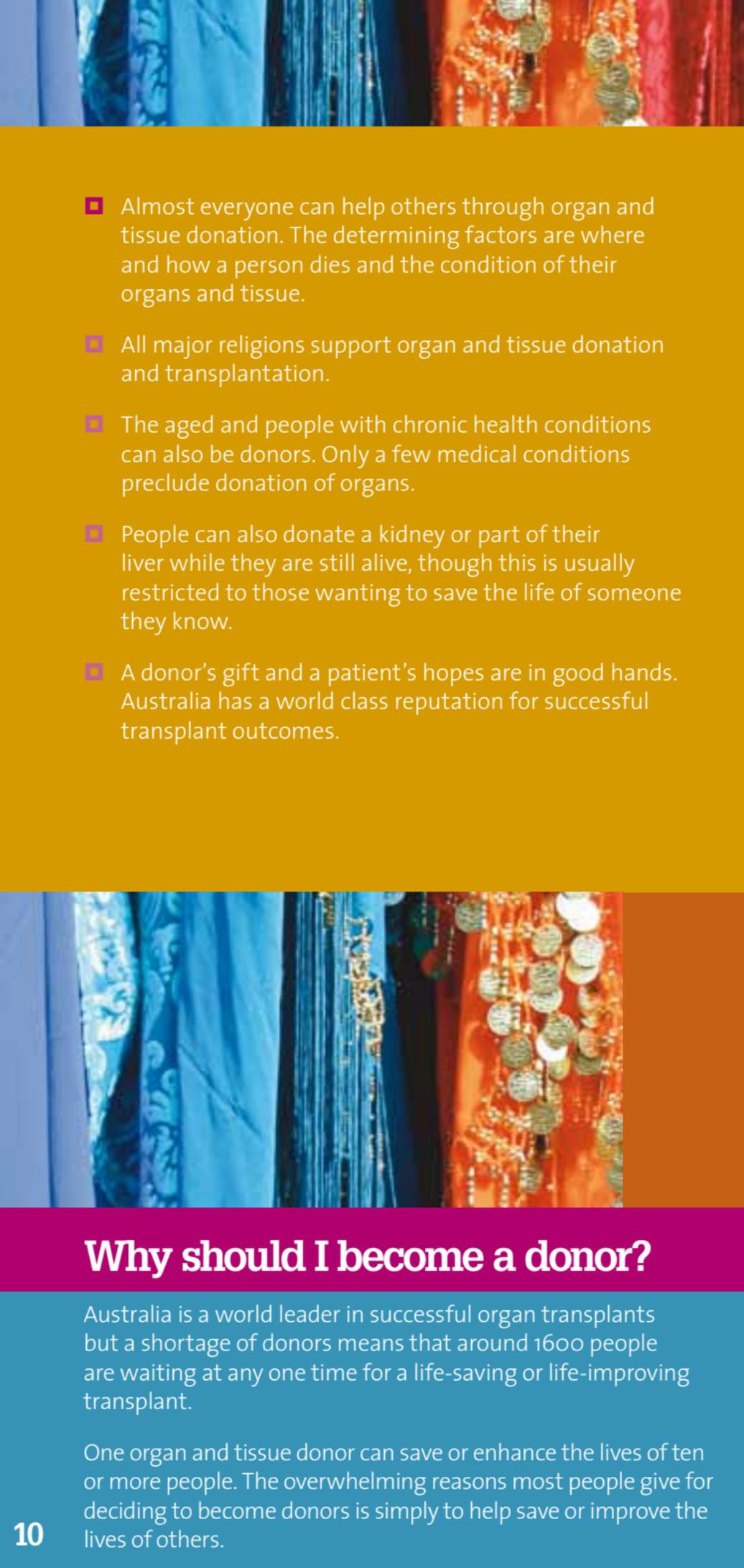
"Where self exists, there is no God.

Where God exists, there is no self." Guru Nanak, Guru Granth Sahib.

In addition, the Sikh faith stresses the importance of performing noble deeds. Sikh teachings are replete with many examples of selfless giving and sacrifice as shown by the ten Gurus and other Sikhs.



Sourced from: Hindu Dharma and Organ Donation – A guide to organ donation and Hindu beliefs; Sikhism and Organ Donation – A guide to organ donation and Sikh beliefs - both documents compiled by Rachel Howitt, Bradford Hospitals, NHS Trust, UK Transplant, April 2003.

- 
- Almost everyone can help others through organ and tissue donation. The determining factors are where and how a person dies and the condition of their organs and tissue.
 - All major religions support organ and tissue donation and transplantation.
 - The aged and people with chronic health conditions can also be donors. Only a few medical conditions preclude donation of organs.
 - People can also donate a kidney or part of their liver while they are still alive, though this is usually restricted to those wanting to save the life of someone they know.
 - A donor's gift and a patient's hopes are in good hands. Australia has a world class reputation for successful transplant outcomes.

Why should I become a donor?

Australia is a world leader in successful organ transplants but a shortage of donors means that around 1600 people are waiting at any one time for a life-saving or life-improving transplant.

One organ and tissue donor can save or enhance the lives of ten or more people. The overwhelming reasons most people give for deciding to become donors is simply to help save or improve the lives of others.

Does my family need to know my donation wishes?

If the situation arises, the family of every potential donor will be asked to give their consent for organ and/or tissue donation to proceed. The request will only be made by trained health professionals.

Registering to be an organ and tissue donor is not enough. Even if you register your wish to be a donor, your family will still be asked to give consent.

After you have discovered the facts about organ and tissue donation, and registered an informed decision to become an organ and tissue donor, it is important that you discuss your wishes with your family and you also need to ask and know their wishes.



Should I register?

The Australian Organ Donor Register is the official national register for organ and tissue donation. The register keeps a record of whether a person wishes to be a donor and of the organs and tissues they agree to donate. Authorised medical personnel can access the register 24 hours a day from anywhere in Australia.

How do I register?

You can register your donation decision by either:

- ▣ Going to www.donorregister.gov.au and registering online
- ▣ Calling 1800 777 203*
- ▣ Visiting your local Medicare office.

* Call charges apply from pay and mobile phones only.

Stories of hope

To read about people who's lives have been touched by organ and tissue donation, visit www.donatelife.gov.au and look at the online Book of Life.

Share your decision

People from all walks of life depend on organ and tissue donations, regardless of race, origin, religion or language.

A diverse range of religions including Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism maintain theories that support the concept of donation. Giving the gift of life to another and making this sacrifice for the benefit of others is seen to be the ultimate act of altruism.

Whatever you decide about donation, the people close to you need to know your decision.

DISCOVER the facts about organ and tissue donation
DECIDE about becoming a donor
DISCUSS your decision with the people close to you,
and know each other's wishes.

This project is sponsored by



Australian Government
Organ and Tissue Authority



www.donatelife.gov.au