There are many different perspectives about organ and tissue donation and transplantation. In this learning sequence students explore these by considering some of the barriers to organ and tissue donation and some ethical issues relating to transplantation. Personal stories are used to portray a range of perspectives about the process of organ and tissue donation; and these perspectives are highlighted in the film The Last Race. By the end of this learning sequence, students will be in a better position to make an informed decision in relation to organ and tissue donation; and to understand the importance of sharing this decision with family and friends. The learning activities are aligned to the Australian Curriculum and the materials used to support students’ learning are mainly developed by the Organ and Tissue Authority (DonateLife).
Background for teachers

The activities in this education resource have been designed to support teachers as they develop students’ awareness of organ and tissue donation for transplantation. Students’ learning will be most effective if English and Science teachers coordinate their teaching programs to allow students to complete the activities from this learning sequence during the same term. By using the resource teachers will be helping to facilitate the national reform agenda announced by the Australian Government in 2008. This agenda, World’s Best Practice Approach to Organ and Tissue Donation for Transplantation, aims to:

- increase the capability and capacity within the health system to maximise donation rates; and
- raise community awareness and stakeholder engagement across Australia to promote organ and tissue donation.

Teachers need to be sensitive to the fact that the activities in this resource raise the issue of death and dying. In particular, the emotions and needs of students in your class who have personal or family experience with organ and tissue donation and/or transplantation need to be considered (and students who may require an organ transplant in the future due to an existing illness). Other students in the class may also feel some caution about discussing issues relating to organ and tissue donation. Before asking your students to engage in these class activities teachers need to establish a ‘safe’ environment by developing students’ ability to listen to a range of ideas and respect ideas that are different to their own.

Organ and tissue donation is a life-saving and life-transforming process. Organs are removed from a donor and transplanted into someone who is very ill or dying from organ failure. Eye and tissue donation can save or improve the quality of life for others, such as restoring the gift of sight.

While Australia is a world leader for successful transplant outcomes, around 1600 people are on Australian organ transplant waiting lists at any one time. In 2015, there were 435 deceased organ donors who gave 1241 Australians a new chance at life which is the highest donation and transplantation outcome since national records began. However, many Australians are unaware of the rarity of organ donation; less than 1% of people die in hospital in the specific circumstances where organ donation is possible, e.g. on a ventilator in an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) or Emergency Department. Whereas organ donation can only occur under very specific circumstances, these circumstances don’t apply to tissue donation. Many more people can become eye and tissue donors as tissues can be donated up to 24 hours after death regardless of where death occurred.
Learning descriptions

ENGLISH

Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts [ACELT1635]

Interpret, analyse and evaluate how different perspectives of issue, event, situation, individuals or groups are constructed to serve specific purposes in texts [ACELY1742]

Present an argument about a literary text based on initial impressions and subsequent analysis of the whole text [ACELT1771]

Explore and explain the combinations of language and visual choices that authors make to present information, opinions and perspectives in different texts [ACELY1745]

Create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that present a point of view and advance or illustrate arguments, including texts that integrate visual, print and/or audio features [ACELY1746]

SCIENCE

Multi-cellular organisms rely on coordinated and interdependent internal systems to respond to changes to their environment [ACSSU175]

Advances in scientific understanding often rely on developments in technology and technological advances are often linked to scientific discoveries [ACSHE158]

The values and needs of contemporary society can influence the focus of scientific research [ACSHE228]

References

DonateLife website — www.donatelife.gov.au

DonateLife Book of Life, Volumes 1, 2, 7 and 8 (2011)


To download The Last Race (Alagna Films) please send your request and contact details to — enquiries@donatelife.gov.au

How do we interact with others when we are out of our ‘comfort zone’? This activity encourages students to reflect on how they feel and behave in a conversation where they explore their beliefs about a challenging issue. Ensure your students understand that when discussing any challenging issue members of the class will hold a range of perspectives. They need to listen to others with respect and to challenge ideas rather than individuals; it is important each student feels safe to share their ideas without being ridiculed or criticised. Students should also understand their views about these issues may change over time as a result of personal experience or additional information.

Select a challenging issue that will engage your students and write it on the board in the form of a statement e.g. ‘The family should be allowed to make the final decision about whether their loved one becomes an organ and tissue donor’. Or… ‘Donated organs from a young, healthy person should only go to another young person’. Or… ‘The views of the family should not be taken into account when a potential donor has registered their consent to be an organ and tissue donor’. (Child immunisation, capital punishment and mandatory voting are other examples of topics that have scientific, moral and ethical dimensions and will encourage your students to reflect on the reasons they hold their current beliefs.)

Ask each student to write a personal reflection that indicates whether they agree or disagree with the statement on the board; the reflection should also consider some of the reasons why they hold this belief. Assure your students this reflection will remain personal; no-one (including the teacher) needs to see what they write.

Invite your students to then discuss the statement with another student — and to explore the facts and ideas that support their beliefs about this issue (What makes you say that?). After these discussions have taken place, ask your students to form small groups and share their ideas.

Your feedback to the students during this activity should focus on their openness to the ideas of others and the way they seek to clarify their own ideas and the ideas of others.

Then ask your students to complete Student activity sheet 1: Exploring personal thoughts where they reflect on how they felt about sharing their ideas with others.
Many perspectives

LEARNING DESCRIPTIONS

Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts [ACELT1635]

Interpret, analyse and evaluate how different perspectives of issue, event, situation, individuals or groups are constructed to serve specific purposes in texts [ACELY1742]

Many students might not have previously considered the issue of organ and tissue donation. In this activity students will explore a range of perspectives in relation to organ and tissue donation and transplantation. First they will analyse stories reflecting on the personal experiences of individuals and families. Then they will explore some of the misconceptions that can create barriers to people deciding about becoming donors.

Part A

Ask your students to work in five groups and provide each group with one of the following stories:

- ‘Anton’, DonateLife Book of Life, Volume 1
- ‘Ali’s gift’, DonateLife Book of Life, Volume 1
- ‘Eyes see all!’, DonateLife Book of Life, Volume 2
- ‘With science and humanity’, DonateLife Book of Life, Volume 7
- ‘An honour and a privilege’, DonateLife Book of Life, Volume 8

After students have read the story they have been allocated, ask each group to complete Student activity sheet 2: Personal stories. Groups should then provide a brief report to the class about the story they read, highlighting the relationship of the author to organ and tissue donation and transplantation.

Explain to your students that the stories were published by the Organ and Tissue Authority to encourage Australians to find out the facts about organ and tissue donation, to make well informed decisions, and to discuss those decisions with their families. In a class discussion ask them questions such as:

- In what ways do you think that the audience and purpose of this collection may have influenced what the writers revealed about their experience?
- How effective are personal stories for engaging readers with the issue of organ and tissue donation?
- What different perspectives on organ and tissue donation or transplantation are represented in the stories?
- Do you think that these stories represent a broad spectrum of ideas about organ and tissue donation in the community?


**Part B**

It is valid to decide not to be an organ and tissue donor but some people hold assumptions that act as barriers to making an informed decision about this subject. One of these assumptions is *Doctors won’t work as hard to save my life if they know I’ve decided to become a donor*. Discuss with your students what they might do to address this misconception. Ask them questions such as:

- How do misconceptions gain credibility?
- Do you think this statement is true?
- Do you think that it is a valid perspective about organ donation?
- What makes a perspective valid?
- What emotions does this statement play on to gain credibility (e.g. fear, doubt)?
- What does it take to make people change their mind if they are frightened or unsure?
- How can you determine whether information is reliable?
- What techniques would you use to convince people that this statement is not true?

Show your students the response to *Doctors won’t work as hard to save my life if they know I’ve decided to become a donor* that is provided by the Organ and Tissue Authority [http://www.donatelife.gov.au/myths-and-misconceptions](http://www.donatelife.gov.au/myths-and-misconceptions):

> Not so. Medical staff do everything possible to save lives. Their first duty is to you and saving your life. Organ and tissue donation will only be considered after all efforts fail.

> A person may only be able to donate organs where they have been declared brain dead in an intensive care unit in hospital. Brain death is when blood circulation to the brain ceases, and the brain stops functioning and dies with no possibility of recovery. A series of tests carried out by two independent and appropriately qualified senior doctors establishes that brain death has occurred.

> People are sometimes confused about the difference between brain death and coma. Brain death is completely different from coma. A patient in a coma is unconscious because their brain is injured in some way, but their brain can continue to function and may heal. Medical tests can clearly distinguish between brain death and coma.

> Organ donation may also be possible after a person’s heart has stopped beating, commonly referred to as donation after cardiac death or donation after circulatory death.

> A far greater number of people have the opportunity to donate tissue for transplantation. Tissue donation does not require the donor’s death to have occurred in the same limited circumstances as organ donation for transplantation to be successful.

Ask students to work in pairs to write a different response to this misconception about doctors’ attitudes to donors; one they think would be even more powerful for Year 9 readers (they can use the same information but change the words). Invite students to share their responses with the class. Highlight persuasive language and other techniques students use to counter the misconception.


- select two of the ‘myths and misconceptions’ they think many Year 9 students may believe;
- write alternative responses that aim to convince Year 9 readers the statements are not true; and
- suggest ways of redesigning this page of the website to maximise the impact of the information for Year 9 students.
Christopher's donation story started when he collapsed at school one day from a cerebral haemorrhage just five weeks short of his 15th birthday. That evening we were told that Christopher was not going to survive. Michael, our two other boys (Daniel and Harrison) and I sat huddled together absorbing the news. Our beautiful, happy, and seemingly healthy boy would not be coming home. He would never be coming home. It was unimaginable!

There were many thoughts that went through our minds at the time but the one constant thought was that Christopher's big, beautiful, loving heart had to keep beating. Knowing that part of Christopher was going to keep living was a great comfort to us whilst we were dealing with losing him. Christopher donated his heart, lungs, liver and kidneys.

continues on next page
Although he hadn’t specifically stated that he wanted to donate his organs, in a family conversation about organ donation a short while before his death, Christopher had indicated that he was a supporter of organ donation. Michael, Daniel, Harrison and I just knew that he would have wanted to help others in this way and so it was an easy decision. The transplant team lead us through the long process, showing great care and compassion and treating Christopher with dignity and respect.

It has been said that donating Christopher’s organs was a very generous thing for us to do. We didn’t feel generous, instead we felt that we were just doing what felt right—right for us to help get through our loss and right for Christopher.

It is now nine months since we lost Christopher and we miss him terribly. We miss many things about him but mostly we miss the love and laughter he brought to our lives. We know that his gift has given five very lucky recipients and their families a new beginning. We hope that they all lead happy and healthy lives filled with some of the love and laughter he brought into our lives. We are so very proud of Christopher. He will live forever in our hearts.

Judy, Michael, Daniel and Harrison

Ask your students to brainstorm what function the brain has and its significance for human life. Where necessary, allow time for students to do some additional reading to explore questions they have.

Refer to the following sections of the story; encourage your students to share their understandings about what was happening in each of these sections:

- ... he collapsed at school one day from a cerebral haemorrhage ... Establish with your students what a cerebral haemorrhage is and how it affects the human body.
- ... Christopher was not going to survive ... What is necessary for humans to survive? Why did the doctors know Christopher was not going to survive? Invite students to read pages 6–11 of the ‘Understanding Death and Donation’ booklet from the DonateLife website and to identify the circumstances that must exist before organs can be removed from a donor’s body.
- Knowing that part of Christopher was going to keep living was a great comfort to us whilst we were dealing with losing him ... Discuss with your students how Christopher’s heart and other organs were being kept alive even though the doctors had established he was not going to survive. Ask them why they think the family found this comforting?
- ... he hadn’t specifically stated that he wanted to donate his organs, ... Christopher had indicated that he was a supporter of organ donation. Ask students to suggest what factors the family and the doctors might consider in deciding whether Christopher could be an organ donor. Information relevant to this question can be found under the heading ‘A question of timing’ at http://www.donatelife.gov.au/discover/about-donation
- ... The transplant team lead us through the long process, showing great care and compassion and treating Christopher with dignity and respect ... Ask students to consider what ethical issues the medical team would need to address (e.g. how are transplant recipients chosen. Information is available at http://www.donatelife.gov.au/frequently-asked-questions). It is also appropriate for students to consider the technological advances necessary to make organ transplantation possible and to reflect on how this research is funded in the Australian community. A history of organ and tissue transplantation can be found at http://www.donatelife.gov.au/sites/default/files/History_of_Organ_and_Tissue_Donation.pdf
Other resources that may be useful to inform these discussions are:

**Part B**

Students spend a lot of time answering questions posed by others. In this activity students get to frame the questions themselves as they take responsibility for creating a ‘web quest’ on organ and tissue donation and transplantation. Challenge your students to think of ways of engaging those who explore their web quest with activities that will help them to develop an understanding of the donation and transplantation process. Working in small groups, students will need to identify relevant and reliable websites that provide information for the questions and activities they design.

If students are familiar with web editor software, and have access to it, they can create a web page. However the activity is not dependent on this level of ICT capability: students can also create a ‘web quest’ in a Word document and include links to the websites they want users to explore.

There is no one way to complete this activity—students should be encouraged to be creative in their approach to the development of the web quest. The following examples are provided as possibilities just to demonstrate the types of realistic tasks that can be included in a web quest.

One example of a focus students might choose is ‘Does transplantation work?’ To explore this question, they may include information such as:
- Transplantation has been described as one of the great success stories of the latter half of the 20th century.
- Australia has a world class reputation for successful transplant outcomes, both in terms of survival rates of the recipients and in the number of organs that are able to be transplanted from each donor. Transplantation has dramatically improved the lives of recipients and enabled them to be active, healthy members of the community. There are significant cost benefits to transplants when compared with the ongoing cost of treatment for people requiring transplants.
- Kidneys are the most predominant organ donated and transplanted in Australia. Kidney transplant survival rates are around 80% after five years.
- End stage kidney disease (ESKD) is a major cost to the health system. A report on the economic impact of ESKD in Australia, *The economic impact of end-stage kidney disease in Australia: projections to 2020* (Cass et al., 2010), published by Kidney Health Australia predicts the annual health sector costs of treating all Australian cases of ESKD will increase from approximately $890 million in 2009 to almost $1.1 billion in 2020.
- As of December 2015, there were 1909 Australians officially listed as waiting for a kidney transplant. There have been significant annual increases in the deceased donation rate since the implementation of the national reform agenda, and 718 people received a kidney transplant from a donor in 2015.
The web quest may then provide links to case studies, interviews with recipients and doctors, and a challenge to use the information to produce a brochure for patients waiting for a kidney transplant.

A second example is a web quest that focuses on what issues should adults consider when making a decision about living organ donation; the task may be to write an information sheet on this issue for patients waiting for a transplant and their families, or for people thinking about becoming a living donor.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has produced a booklet on this subject, *Making a Decision about Living Organ and Tissue Donation* which is available at http://www.donatelife.gov.au/sites/default/files/NHMRC_Making_a_decision_about_living_organ_and_tissue_donation.pdf

Many students will look for support to get started and **Student activity sheet 4: Creating a learning challenge** can be used as a guide for groups as they develop their web quest.

Once each group of students completes their own web quest ask them to use a web quest developed by a different group and to provide feedback to the group.
The Last Race

LEARNING DESCRIPTIONS

Present an argument about a literary text based on initial impressions and subsequent analysis of the whole text [ACELT1771]

Interpret, analyse and evaluate how different perspectives of issue, event, situation, individuals or groups are constructed to serve specific purposes in texts [ACELY1742]

Explore and explain the combinations of language and visual choices that authors make to present information, opinions and perspectives in different texts [ACELY1745]

If students have followed the learning sequence in this resource they will have already explored many perspectives on the process of organ and tissue donation and transplantation; they will also have an understanding of the concept of ‘brain death’. The Last Race is a powerful drama that explores these issues and challenges students to consider difficult decisions relating to organ donation. The film depicts a family as they struggle to make a decision about donating their son’s organs and a parallel story of two hospital patients waiting for a transplant.

The film can be downloaded for free for educational use by sending a request to enquiries@donatelife.gov.au. Some of the questions in this section are based on activities in the study guide for The Last Race developed by ATOM that can be found at http://www.donatelife.gov.au/sites/default/files/The_last_race_study_guide.pdf.

Students will experience a range of emotions as they watch The Last Race so it is important the classroom environment is supportive and non-judgemental. The duration of the film is 30 minutes, so be sure to allow enough time to debrief your students in a class discussion after they view it. Ask your students questions such as:

- Why do you think that Mike’s family found it so difficult to make the decision about donating his organs?
- Do you think that the medical staff provided Mike’s family with adequate information, support and time to make the decision?
- Mike’s girlfriend strongly disagreed with his family during their discussions. Do you think it was appropriate that she was included in making the decision?
- What are some of the emotions that Charlie and her father experienced in the film?
- How do you think that the donated organ will affect Charlie’s life?
- What is powerful about portraying an event through film rather than other texts such as books?

Then ask your students to complete Student activity sheet 5: The Last Race where they analyse the film and reflect on its impact. Once students have written short responses to the questions on the activity sheet, encourage them to share these responses in small group discussions.
Have the conversation

LEARNING DESCRIPTIONS

Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts [ACELT1635]

Create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that present a point of view and advance or illustrate arguments, including texts that integrate visual, print and/or audio features [ACELY1746]

In Australia, the family will always be asked to confirm the donation wishes of a potential organ and tissue donor even if the potential donor has registered to be a donor. After watching The Last Race, students will appreciate how difficult this responsibility can be at a time when family members may be overwhelmed by shock and grief. For this reason, anyone who makes the decision to become an organ and tissue donor should communicate their wishes to their family.

In the DonateLife Book of Life (Volume 7) Tinni’s mother says that her family had an informal conversation about organ donation just weeks before Tinni’s death during which Tinni said, ‘I won’t need them anymore so someone else can use them.’ Tinni’s mother notes the comfort the family received from letters and cards from the recipients of Tinni’s organs and reflects that, ‘Without this random conversation we wouldn’t have known what to do. We believe that decision would have been too hard to make.’

Because donating organs and tissues is a sensitive issue, potential donors need to ensure their families understand their personal decision by explaining the reasons behind the decision. If family members are unfamiliar with the facts surrounding donation, this conversation is a good time to share resources such as the DonateLife website http://www.donatelife.gov.au/home.

In this activity your students will work in small groups to role play the conversation a potential donor has with their family members to let them know their wishes about organ and tissue donation. Each group needs to decide:

- the perspectives that different members of the family hold (the Myth busting section presents beliefs some family members may hold http://www.donatelife.gov.au/myths-and-misconceptions);
- who will take on each of the roles;
- the setting for the conversation e.g. a family meal, watching a program about donation on TV, after reading about a traumatic event in the news;
- what research, scripting and rehearsal to do before performing the role play in front of the class.
Student activity sheet 1: Exploring personal thoughts

How did you feel when you shared your ideas with other people? Reflect on your experience as you write responses to the following questions.

1. What did it feel like to share your ideas with other people? Did you have any fears?
   Did you enjoy the chance to explore your ideas?

2. What was easiest for you: discussing your ideas with one other person or with a larger group?
   Explain your answer.

3. Are you comfortable with people having ideas that are different to your own or do you try to persuade others to agree with your ideas? Explain your response by referring to the discussions you had.

4. Describe the way your body behaved during the discussions. Did you wave your hands?
   Did you feel hot and/or sweaty? Did you feel stronger?

5. When you heard other people talking about their ideas did it help you to understand your own ideas? Did you feel you needed more information? Did you question assumptions you had made?
Student activity sheet 2: Personal stories

1. Describe the relationship the author of your story has with organ and/or tissue donation or transplantation.

2. What messages (both stated and implied) does the author give about organ and/or tissue donation or transplantation?

3. What emotions are conveyed in the story? Are these the emotions that you associate with grief and suffering?

4. Think about the purpose and audience for the story. How do you think this is reflected in the style of language and the tone used to convey emotion?

5. What evidence is there in the story about the writer’s attitude to, and experience of, death?
Student activity sheet 3: Countering misconceptions


1. Select two of the ‘myths and misconceptions’ that Year 9 students may think are true. Write alternative responses to convince Year 9 readers the statements are not true.

2. Imagine you have been given responsibility for redesigning this page of the website. What changes would you make to maximise the impact of the information for Year 9 students?
Student activity sheet 4: Creating a learning challenge

Your task is to create a ‘web quest’ that helps users to develop an understanding of organ and/or tissue donation and transplantation. How are you going to engage those who explore your web quest? What activities do you want them to complete and what questions will you ask them? Identify at least four (4) reliable websites that provide information for the questions and activities you design.

1. What will be the focus of your web quest? What name will you use?

2. How will you make it engaging for users? Make sure users don’t get the impression this is just a set of questions they have to provide answers for.

3. Decide on the main activity users of the web quest need to complete. Is it a problem to solve? A scenario to complete? A brochure to publish online? Take time to make this decision as the activity you choose will shape the success of the users’ experience.

4. How will you provide information or guidance to those who use your web quest? You need to support users by explaining clearly what they are to do and by directing them to relevant information.

5. How will you evaluate the reliability of the websites users will rely on to find key information? Be sure to present links to selected websites as part of your description of the task to be completed.

6. Look back over the activity and ensure that when users complete it they will have gained a better understanding of some aspect of the process of organ and/or tissue donation or transplantation.

7. When you’ve finished your web quest ask another group to do it. Then ask them for feedback about:
   - what they learned
   - what they would change to make it more engaging.
Student activity sheet 5: The Last Race

1. What different emotions are displayed by members of Mike’s family as they respond to the news that Mike is ‘brain dead’? What devices are used to convey these emotions? Do you think Anna’s reaction is realistic?

2. What visual devices are used in the film to convey grief and suffering and to build tension?

3. How is Dr Matsui depicted? Refer to examples where he relates to patients.

4. What is the impact of having two different stories in the film?

5. What are some of the ethical issues about organ donation that are raised in the film? (For example, the decision about which patient will become the organ recipient.)

6. What message/s does the film portray about the availability of organs for donation in Australia?

7. Select one character from The Last Race: write a diary entry or a set of text messages from the perspective of that character that reflects on the events of the day (use the back of this page).
I will always remember Anton saying ‘Mum, please don’t tell people about my high distinctions, I don’t care about being better than everyone else. I just want to be normal’. That was Anton. Never a boaster, always positive. He was a well educated, friendly, fun loving 22 year old with a bright future. Everyone loved being around him.

He was a lucky boy, especially lucky when he was very young. We thought we would lose him before he was one year old. He had heart surgery at seven months and many months of medication following. That surgery allowed him (and us) another 21 years of a healthy and fun-filled life.

Anton was passionate about film—from animation to documentary. He completed a degree in Film and Screen and, on a shoestring budget, set off to produce a movie on Longboard Skating. He wasn’t an experienced skater but after a great day of filming he got into his skater safety clothing and helmet and tried the course. He had a freak collision at slow speed with another skater, hit his head on the concrete and never regained consciousness. He had a massive brain injury.

We were devastated. His father, brother and myself struggled to imagine life without him. As a critical care nurse I knew he would never recover from the huge brain trauma. I knew he was an ideal donor candidate. Anton had declared on facebook his support for organ donation plus we knew what he would have wanted. We saw Anton’s organ donations as the only positive thing to result from his death.

Accepting death is extremely difficult for many families. When it happens to someone you love so much there is an early stage of disbelief and a wish to preserve the life that exists. Many people take a few days to accept the reality.

Every day we miss him. It is a monumental challenge to enjoy life without him. I am comforted by the thought that somebody has a chance they would never otherwise have had.

Kate
Ali’s gift

Ali was 32. She was my wife and devoted mother to our two beautiful children, James (three) and Stella (one). When she collapsed at home in the early hours and called out to me I knew straight away that something bad was happening, but I wasn’t prepared for just how bad. I didn’t know it at the time but Ali was suffering a brain haemorrhage.

She made it to hospital and was still trying to move before being airlifted to hospital. By the time doctors were able to assess her she had suffered a second bleed and there was nothing they could do. I was devastated, mostly for our children who would now grow up without their mother, she loved them so very much.

Ali loved medical shows on television and made me watch them more than I liked. Because of this I knew what was coming next—the question of organ donation. We were registered donors but registering is the easy part. It was the hardest decision of my life. Hard because it felt like I was giving up on Ali, giving up on us and giving up on our children. Miracles happen, right?

Miracles do happen, just not for our family that day. Ali delivered a miracle to four other families whose lives have been changed forever. It has provided our family with some comfort to know that our Ali has been able to give something so special to four very sick Australians. If she were a soldier they would be awarding her a VC. Now Remembrance Day for me will be about remembering Ali and her life of giving to others.

Mark

With Ali.
Eyes see all!

My name is Melissa and I consider myself to be very fortunate. I was diagnosed with a corneal disease, Keratoconus, 23 years ago at the age of 21. I was told then that should my condition deteriorate I would require a corneal graft, ‘though we don’t do many of those’.

In my late thirties I was devastated to learn that I was ‘technically blind’. As my condition was a gradual, slow deterioration, I had no idea how impaired my vision really was, I just adjusted. I had a young daughter, did office work and lived life, unaware how serious my condition had become.

My name was immediately added to the list, as a corneal graft was my only option. A very daunting thought! I am fortunate to have been the recipient of two beautiful donor corneas.

I remember my first real venture back into the world of sight. It was one morning and I looked out the window. I could see veins on leaves, specks on concrete, tiles on roofs and I could see for a mile (well I thought so anyway) – I broke down! I wanted to tell the world that I could now see its beauty in its entirety.

There is mixed feelings associated with being a tissue recipient. There are feelings:

Sadness—you are aware someone else has passed to enable you to have the gift of sight.

Gratitude—to those who made the ultimate decision at such a difficult time in their life.

Thankfulness—to my donors for giving me a gift which will always be remembered.

I have learned that since being diagnosed with a corneal disease, the reason not many grafts were performed was that there was no medium to store the cornea until transplantation. Over the years such a storage medium has been developed.

It has been seven years since my last graft and I recently visited my wonderful opthamologist, who is very pleased with my progress. I love my glasses, love life and will always be grateful for my very precious gifts.

Melissa.
Throughout my medical career I have been privileged to regularly come in direct contact with the organ and tissue donation and transplantation process.

It is an area filled with dedicated people doing fantastic work. Whether it is the families devastated by the loss of a loved one making the decision to help another family, the committed staff that make the donation process occur, the highly skilled surgeons that operate through the night to perform the transplants, the seriously ill patients that then come back to good health or the scientists who ensure that the whole process can proceed. Each of them contributes an important element in a highly complex process.

I have always been impressed and proud to be associated with this group of individuals who have shown a dedication to the life extending and life changing processes of organ and tissue donation and have done much to progress the science and ethics of this area of medicine at a state, national and international level.

Whilst it is a tragedy that transplantation often occurs because of the loss of another’s life, the fact that so much good can come from this terrible event is a testament to the combination of science and humanity that work together to make this process occur.
An honour and a privilege

As a health professional working in organ and tissue donation for the past 21 years, I feel very privileged to have witnessed first hand the generosity of donors and their families who have considered and agreed to organ and tissue donation at an incredibly traumatic time in their lives.

Working originally as a Donor Coordinator, I was closely involved with the family, providing them with information and support and guiding them through the donation process. It is very humbling to sit with a family while they share intimate moments and recall anecdotes of their loved one with you. The decisions that they made have literally saved the lives of hundreds of Australians and enhanced the lives of many others.

Over the years, donor families have helped health professionals too. They have helped to shape our practices by providing us with valuable insight into their needs and how we can best support them. In my current role as Agency Manager, I manage the provision of bereavement support to families and education to staff in hospitals to ensure that families are offered the opportunity of donation in a compassionate and respectful manner.

In reflecting on my experience with donor families, I would say without hesitation, that many families have drawn comfort from the fact that they were able to honour the wishes of their loved ones by agreeing to donation and helping others.

My heartfelt thanks goes to all families who have been a part of the donation journey and my encouragement goes to future families who discuss organ donation and make their wishes known.

Tina