

Check your vocabulary

Language plays an important role in the misconceptions and the fears about organ, eye, and tissue donation. Please consider how a donor family and the general public may perceive insensitive terminology. As of May 2004, the following terminology was approved by the AOPO Donor Family Council. Avoiding terminology that causes concern among donor families and the general public will not only help further their understanding, but will also improve their acceptance of the donation process. We request that you support the following changes in terminology within your service area.

Please use:

“Recover” organs

Instead of “Harvesting”

“Harvest” is a word that has long been accepted by the medical community. However, the public at large associates the word “harvest” with crops, crows, and combines. It can be quite unpalatable, especially to donor families when associated with their loved ones’ organs. The word “recovery” helps people understand that removal of a loved one’s organs and tissues for transplant is a respectable surgical procedure.

“Deceased Donor” or “Deceased Donation”

Instead of “Cadaver” or “Cadaveric”

In the past, the term donor did not require any specificity. Today as more people choose to become living donors, there is a need to distinguish between living and deceased donors. Reportedly, the term cadaveric depersonalizes the fact that a gift was offered to someone upon an individual’s death. Webster defines cadaver as “dead bodies intended for dissection.” This is not the positive message we wish to convey to the public or donor families.

“Ventilated Support”

Instead of “Life Support”

There are two ways to determine death: cardiac death (when the heart stops functioning) and brain death (when the brain stops functioning). The term “life support” proves to be a confusing term when used in conjunction with brain death. When death occurs, there is no support that can make the individual live again. In the presence of brain death, an individual may share the gift of life with others through organ, eye, and tissue donation. The organs are perfused with oxygen and blood through “mechanical” support. “Mechanical” or “ventilated support” are appropriate terms for the support given to a deceased person in the event of organ, eye, and tissue donation.