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LifeCenter Northwest Credits 2020 Success to Resilience and Donor Generosity

The organ procurement organization (OPO) embraced mission-focused innovation and partnership to save lives through organ and tissue donation amid the pandemic

Bellevue, Wash. (Jan. 12, 2021) – As we enter a new year, LifeCenter Northwest extends its deepest gratitude to the organ and tissue donors, and their families, who made 2020 a year of second chances for thousands of others. Together, we offered hope in a year of uncertainty by helping to save and heal lives through donation and transplantation. Thanks to the generosity of 298 donor heroes in our region, 861 organs were transplanted last year – saving 813 lives. In addition, 647 donors provided healing tissue allografts for patients across the northwest.

Prior to the onset of public shutdowns, LifeCenter Northwest was prepared to honor donors' wishes amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The organization implemented infectious disease risk assessments by partnering with specialist Dr. Ajit Limaye and the University of Washington Medical Center in Seattle for case consultation and testing of organ donors. This innovative practice made rapid donor testing and disease consultation readily available to address the risk of the coronavirus infection and ensure the safety and quality of organs to transplant patients.

"Our ability to put together this program that allowed for rapid, real-time testing of both the donor and the recipient allowed transplant surgeons and transplant teams to feel comfortable," says Dr. Ajit Limaye, director of the Solid Organ Transplant Infectious Disease Program at the University of Washington.

A missed opportunity in organ donation puts lives at risk. Therefore, LifeCenter Northwest remained at the forefront of advancing organ and tissue donation. The OPO facilitated its first heart recovery from a donor after circulatory death during the public health crisis – at the time, this procedure was one of only 50 of its kind in the nation's history. In addition, and despite the fact that several tissue processing centers had suspended operations due to COVID-19, LifeCenter Northwest leveraged its diverse partnerships and continued to facilitate tissue donations that will be used to replace heart valves, repair ligaments, treat burns, and heal bone and joint injuries.

Furthermore, when commercial travel was reduced by 70 percent in the region, a LifeCenter Northwest employee provided unprecedented door-to-door service to facilitate the donation and transport of kidneys from a one-month-old donor. This precious gift was personally escorted from Seattle by commercial flight and taxi to an out-of-state transplant center to ensure a safe arrival. This special effort enabled the grieving family to make a meaningful decision and offer the gift of life to another child in need.



“We are grateful to the donors and their families for their generosity and courage, who despite their loss, chose to give life to others,” says Kevin O’Connor, CEO of LifeCenter Northwest. “Our ability to steward these gifts during a pandemic is the direct result of our talented and resilient staff, who collaborate with hospitals, counsel and console donor families in their darkest moments, and partner with the larger medical community throughout the region.”

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), there are more than 108,000 patients on the nation’s organ transplant waiting list, with more than 2,220 of these patients residing in our region as of Jan. 1, 2021.

“The opportunity to make a profound difference for people awaiting a life-saving transplant motivates us each day, but there is still much work to be done,” says O’Connor. “Our resolve to help others has only strengthened amid the challenges of this pandemic. We will never stop working to improve our services so that we can save more lives and keep more families together.”

About LifeCenter Northwest

LifeCenter Northwest is the federally-designated organ procurement organization serving Alaska, Montana, North Idaho and Washington—the largest geographic donation service area in the United States. For more information, or to register to be an organ, eye and tissue donor, please visit www.lcnw.org.

