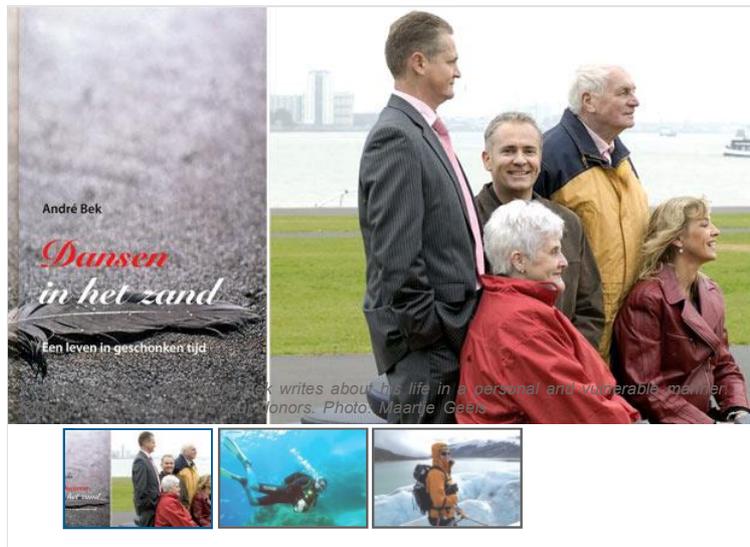


THE TIMES

Monday, March 12, 2012 by Moira Mizzi and Lara Farrugia

Give a kidney – one's enough



Love is a unique phenomenon where one gives oneself, at times totally, to the benefit of a loved one without losing the capacity to love oneself.

For many, love is the ultimate experience, the key to eternal happiness and serenity; for others it is a source of pain and deep suffering especially when that love is not acknowledged and returned or if the loved one is lost for some reason or the other.

Donating an organ to another human being in need is one of the deepest and most selfless acts of love that one human being can bestow to another especially since in most cases that person would have no idea who the other person is.

Organ donation is a personal act of goodwill towards humanity, where live and cadaveric donors alike choose to help extend other peoples' lives unconditionally by donating substances such as blood, bone marrow, tissues, cells and organs for the therapeutic use by the recipient.

In this way donors help maintain and possibly improve the quality of life of people with chronic, debilitating and often life-threatening conditions such as kidney, liver, heart or lung failure which can be brought on from a myriad of conditions.

Organ transplantation, in fact, has been a very successful treatment of choice for serious health conditions since 1954 due to the safeguarding of high quality and safety standards in organ donation.

This success has led to an increase in demand of organs, which invariably supersedes the number of donors.

This pressing need for donors is a challenge that could only be made possible through public acceptance and reassurance. According to the Eurobarometer (2010), mistrust and apprehension of exploitation of the human body are the prevailing reasons that hold a person back from offering one's own organs or those of a late relative.

Some people, however, still find the strength within to bypass this resistance even when faced with the searing pain of losing a loved one or with the challenge of compromising their own health.

André Bek was 25 when in 1984 he discovered he was suffering with IgA nephropathy an autoimmune disease also known as IgA nephritis, IgAN, Berger's disease and synpharyngitic glomerulonephritis and that only 15 per cent of his kidneys were functioning. "At the time I had everything going good for me," he reminisces.

"I had already graduated as a dentist and had just obtained my Master's degree and I was in love with the beautiful girl who is still my partner to this day. In my youthful energy I felt invulnerable and insecure, in fact I had just followed the officer training for the Royal Dutch Marine Corps, the toughest military training in the Netherlands and had also attained the first part of my pilot's licence."

When André started suffering from frequent severe head-aches his neurologist put it down to bad posture during his work; however, a visit to an internist clin-ched the diagnoses and his fate.

"All of a sudden I was a weak patient, I was always tired and nauseous and the headaches and the itching assailed me all day," Mr Bek recounts with misty eyes.

"I was told I had to start dialyses, a life-depending machine; as a young man, full of dreams and so deeply in love with José, I simply could not live with that prospect, for me it was the worst kind of horror. At first life was meaningless and I just wanted to die."

His family, however, were not of the same frame of mind. "My dears brought to me other thoughts," he explains, "they offered themselves as potential donors at a time when living donation was a relatively unknown phenomenon."

Altruistic donation

Patients with kidney failure have the option of dialysis or transplantation when both their kidneys fail.

Every day I try to enjoy life to the full with my loved ones; I call it an art of accepting what has happened while at the same time not accepting that my life is controlled

A kidney transplant can provide patients with freedom from regular dialysis, a better quality of life and longer life expectancy. Unfortunately, very few patients have someone who can give them a kidney and on average most patients have to wait on dialysis for two to three years before a kidney becomes available.

In Malta, the beacon of support in organ donation and transplantation is the 275-strong member Transplant Support Group whose main aims is to:

- Bring together transplantees of organs and tissues both locally and abroad,
- Look after the needs of those awaiting transplantation,
- Bring to the attention of competent authorities any shortcomings and ethical issues,
- Promote on an ongoing campaign the awareness as well as the encouragement of the registration of more persons as organ donors locally,
- Honour deceased donors and maintain a constant liaison with the health authorities and organisations working for similar objectives.

Organ donation and transplantation are sensitive and difficult issues because they involve the lives and deaths of human beings. The people involved are real. They have a family, friends, colleagues, pets and mean something to someone. The goodwill of a donor helps the receiver enjoy the gift of life longer.

An increased availability of organs for donation possibly results in a lesser number of people dying while waiting for a transplant and in turn maximising the recipient's quality of life.

It is up to each and every one of us. Whoever is willing to be a donor should make their request known to their family and friends. This will help facilitate difficult decisions for relatives and give an unknown person one's life back.

After all, it is important to remember that there is nothing more precious than the gift of life.

www.transplantsupport.com.mt

3 Comments

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Connie Deguara

Apr 16th, 08:11

I only donate to close family members,you got to remember if one of yours go you have'nt got another one.

M. Abela

Mar 12th, 16:35

How can one register to become an organ donor ?

Bhavana Pardeshi

Mar 12th, 11:28

"Donating kidney to the stranger is to save one's life. I would like to suggest a documentary "My Kidney, His Life" is the personal story about the fears, concerns and joys experienced throughout the donation process.

To watch the documentary online visit:

<http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/4987/>

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