

Early Identification for Potential Organ Donation

ORGANIZATIONS



CHALLENGE

Maintaining a focus on the timely identification of potential organ donors in conjunction with ongoing patient care demands.

SOLUTION

Use of VISICU's eICU® Program for faster, more efficient identification of potential organ donors.

BENEFITS

- 28% increase in “timely” donor referrals
- 16% rise in overall donor referrals
- Greater efficiency/less burden for caregivers

“Patient deaths are part of the reality of healthcare. One of the gifts of life you can give is organ donation. What the eICU® Program does is bring more awareness to bedside practitioners and clear protocols for the earlier identification of potential organ donors.”

— *Kathy Johnson, RN, Operations Director, Provena Health eICU® Connection*

BACKGROUND

Throughout the nation, many organizations have raised awareness of the value of organ donation. Yet the results of their efforts have not kept pace with the rising demand for life-saving transplant procedures. For every 77 transplants performed in the United States each day, on average, 18 patients die still waiting for organs.¹

Gift of Hope in Elmhurst, Illinois is the organ and tissue donor network serving most of Illinois and northwestern Indiana. Its staff members work closely with hospitals and health systems across the region to identify potential organ donors. Hospitals are asked to contact Gift of Hope whenever patients meet the criteria to be evaluated for possible organ donation. Then, Gift of Hope approaches family members to discuss the process and either inform them of their loved one's decision to donate or offer them the option of donation. Time is of the essence to ensure organ viability.

Hospital nurses are on the front lines of identifying potential organ donors. Many nurses view organ donation as part of the continuum of care and are active in identifying and maintaining the donor. But nurses also are overloaded due to the daily demands of patient care. Sometimes potential donors are overlooked or identified too late to make a difference.

SOLUTION

Provena Health has developed a pioneering strategy to efficiently identify potential organ donors and streamline referrals. A Catholic health system with six hospitals in Illinois, Provena Health implemented an eICU® Program, known as eICU Connection, in June 2005 to provide remote monitoring for intensive care patients. The eICU Program's operations director at the time, Becky Rufo, DNSc, RN, CCRN, realized that the program's integrated clinical data, in-room cameras, microphones and clinical decision support could be used to address additional aspects of care.

After brainstorming for ideas, Rufo and her colleagues focused on leveraging the eICU Program to help bedside nurses identify potential organ donors.² They worked with Gift of Hope in creating a protocol template to guide the process and in developing nurse training materials. Provena Health began using its eICU Program to enhance organ donor identification and referrals in early 2006.

“We were the first health system in the country to utilize the eICU Program to identify potential organ donors,” says Rufo. “It helped identify 14 referrals in the first five months. Two referrals went on to become organ donors. This is a good rate, as it takes an average of 10 referrals to get one donation.”

When Rufo left to serve as operations director for Resurrection Health Care's eICU Partners in June 2007, she was succeeded by Kathy Johnson, RN, as director of the Provena eICU Program. “When my eICU nursing staff is rounding on patients, they provide nursing assessments based on clinical data and observation. We have created a ‘decision tree’ that uses the criteria for organ donation to identify potential donors in the ICU. If a patient meets the criteria, the bedside nurse is notified. The

decision tree also specifies who should make the referral to Gift of Hope,” Johnson says.

Provena Health has inspired other healthcare systems to use the eICU Program as part of the organ donor identification and referral process. Advocate Health Care, which operates eight hospitals in metropolitan Chicago, started doing so in early 2007 to increase organ donor referrals and decrease the associated workload for clinicians. Resurrection Health Care, also in Chicago, will implement the initiative in early 2008.

Cindy Welsh, administrator for Advocate’s eICU Program, says, “With the eICU Program, Gift of Hope can review patient records for potential donors electronically and centrally for all 15 adult ICUs in eight hospitals. This takes some of the burden off of the bedside nurses.”

Advocate’s eICU physicians have helped manage patients between declaration of death and organ procurement, in partnership with Gift of Hope, to increase organ donations. Recently, a new opportunity was identified to use Advocate’s eICU Program to assist Gift of Hope with training new associates in the evaluation of patients being referred as potential organ donors.

RESULTS/METHODS

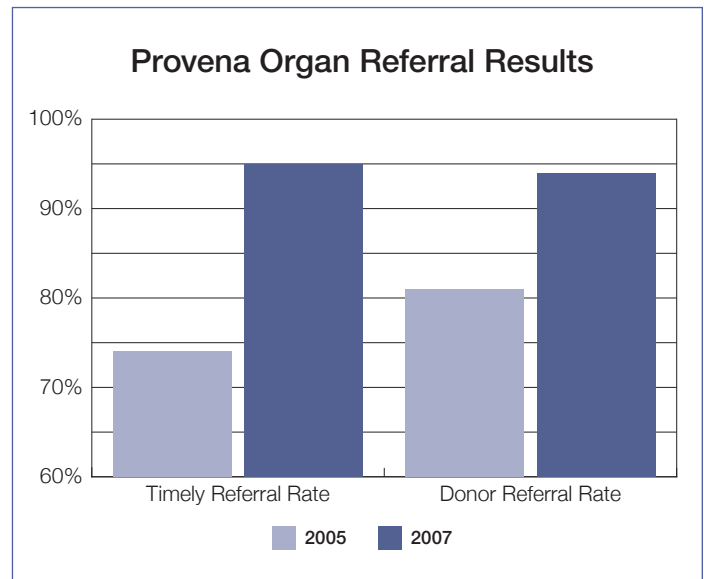
Statistics compiled by Gift of Hope indicate that Provena Health has significantly increased its rate of “timely” organ donor referrals. An organization’s Timely Referral Rate determines what percentage of its referrals was initiated in a timely manner—when a patient meets clinical triggers, as defined by Gift of Hope; and before discontinuation of life-sustaining therapies or other changes could compromise organ viability.

Provena Health’s Timely Referral Rate in 2005 was 74 percent before it began using the eICU Program to aid in identifying potential donors. In 2007, its rate was 95 percent.

In addition to timeliness of referrals, Gift of Hope tracks the successful identification of viable organ donors. For Donor Referral Rate, Gift of Hope pulls patient records to see if any potential donors were missed. Provena Health’s Donor Referral Rate also rose measurably: from 81 percent in 2005 to 94 percent in 2007.

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded Provena Health and Advocate with the national Medal of Honor for their work in saving and enhancing lives through organ and tissue donation. Gift of Hope also honored Provena Health with its Lifesaving Partners Award for applying health system innovation to lifesaving donation.

Advocate’s use of its eICU Program to aid in organ donor referrals was achieving results within months of implementation. Welsh, the program’s administrator, says Gift of Hope staff have mentioned individual cases in which the system helped identi-



fy potential organ donors who previously might not have been referred to their organization.

While Advocate’s primary goal in using eICU capabilities for organ referrals is to identify more potential organ donors, the eICU Program also directly benefits Advocate and its patients. Bedside staff are now contacting the eICU Center when they identify a potential donor so that the eICU nurses can submit the referral to Gift of Hope. This enables the bedside team to focus more of their time tending to patients.

The effort also dovetails with the heart transplant program at Advocate Christ Medical Center. Organ donor referrals are never earmarked for specific institutions, but Advocate’s steps to increase referrals one day could save the life of one of its own transplant patients.

CONCLUSION

As the need for organ donation continues to surge, timely identification and maintenance of potential organ donors is critical to saving lives. Innovative providers are finding that the eICU Program provides an effective model for identifying donors, creating decision protocols and integrating organ donation into the end-of-life continuum of care. ▣

REFERENCES:

- 1) *UNOS Facts and Figures*, United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), <http://www.unos.org>.
- 2) Keefe, Sandy. Bird’s-Eye View: Telemedicine helps identify organ donors in ICU, *Advance for Nurses*, October 2, 2006: 4(21): 114.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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