

MEDICAL BRIEFS

Volunteers needed

Want to give and get at the same time? The Oakwood Annapolis Hospital Auxiliary is sponsoring a "Tea Time" event for interested volunteers 2-4 p.m. Thursday, May 4. While sipping tea and nibbling baked goods, potential volunteers will learn about the hospital's different programs and ways they can give of their time and talents. They'll also tour Oakwood Annapolis Hospital and meet staff members and other volunteers. For more information, contact Oakwood at (313) 791-4711.

"Be a nurse"

In celebration of National Nursing Month, the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum announces the 10th annual "Be a Nurse," program held on the following dates: noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, May 6; 1-5 p.m. Sunday, May 7; noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, May 13; and 1-5 p.m. Sunday, May 14. Visitors can listen to their heartbeats, take their own pulses, and learn the major parts of the body, while learning what the nursing profession is all about. The program is sponsored by the museum and the nursing department at the University of Michigan Health System. The Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum is located at 2220 E. Ann Street, Ann Arbor. For more information, call (734) 938-7457.

Health conference

Madonna University will host a health conference titled "Providing Healing and Hope to the Human Spirit: A Guide for Health Professionals." The purpose is to provide participants of all faiths thought-provoking sessions on spirituality, ethics, faith, meaning and justice issues in health care.

Sessions will be conducted by medical ethics and nursing professionals from St. Joseph Mercy Health System, Mercy Health Services, William Beaumont Hospital and the University of Michigan Health Center. The event is sponsored by Madonna University's Department of Nursing.

The pre-registration fee for nurses, physicians and other health professionals is \$50; walk-in registration is \$20; student registration is \$25. All fees include conference materials, boxed lunch and refreshment breaks. For more information, call (734) 432-5460.

Health fair

The Oakwood Healthcare Center and the Family Resource Center of Westland will sponsor the "Lincoln Jefferson-Barnes Health Fair" 5-7 p.m. Thursday, May 11 at Jefferson-Barnes Elementary School in Westland.

Participants will learn about nutrition, growth and development, safety, community resources, and drug, alcohol and smoking cessation. Over 350 students and family members attended last year's event. For more information, call the Oakwood Healthcare Center at (734) 728-2425 or the Family Resource Center at (734) 595-2279.

We want your health news

There are several ways you can reach the Observer Health & Fitness staff. The Reader Service section provides contact names for you to offer news or information (including medical press releases) to the Observer Health & Fitness staff. Send them to: Health & Fitness, c/o The Observer, 20000 Woodward Ave., Suite 100, Detroit, MI 48202. We also welcome your letters for health and fitness related stories. To submit an item to our newspaper you can call, write, fax or e-mail us.

CALL US:

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Loving life: Brandon Jones, 6, hasn't let two heart transplants slow him down. He plays the drums and sings in his church's choir. He hopes to run the 50-yard dash in the U.S. Transplant Olympics this July in Orlando, Fla.



STAFF PHOTO BY BRYAN MITCHELL

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Whenever Carolyn Hanson, 28, of Detroit speaks publicly about the need for organ donation, she often concludes by saying, "Don't take your organs to heaven, because, heaven knows, we need them here."

Her son, Brandon Jones, 6, plays the drums and sings in his church's choir because someone donated a loved one's heart. In fact, Brandon has received two heart transplants, the first one at 20 months and the second in September 1998. Both transplants were done at the University of Michigan Medical Center.

"I thank God every day for the two families that benefited Brandon. Even the first heart lived for three years in Brandon," said Hanson.

According to the Gift of Life Agency of Michigan, 10 Michigan children received heart transplants and eight received kidney transplants in 1999. Eleven children received healthy livers, and 26 were given the gift of sight with a cornea transplant.

Still, many more people could have been saved. While 116 patients received an organ transplant so far this year, 47 have died waiting. And the waiting list is growing. Almost 2,600 people are waiting to receive solid organs: kidney (1,736), heart (84), lung (130), liver (349) and pancreas (149). Another 134 are waiting for corneas.

"In the last three months, we have had six of our lung patients die," said Mark Gravel, Donation and Organ Preservation Services Director at the U-M Medical Center. Michigan's consent rate of 21.2 percent ranks slightly below the national average for the number of families who consent to donation.

Considering these statistics, Brandon Jones was lucky.

A young boy's ordeal

It was obvious soon after Carolyn Hanson gave birth to twin boys on Dec. 2, 1993, in a small hospital in Fargo, N.D., that something was wrong with Brandon. "His temperature was dropping and he kept on turning blue," said Hanson.

"Brandon was flown to the University of Minnesota Hospital in Minneapolis, where he had his first heart surgery at three days. During the delicate operation, Brandon's nerves to his right



Skilled hands: Dr. Alvis Bernabei, director of thoracic organ transplants at Henry Ford Hospital, performed five heart transplants in five days in February.

diaphragm were severed. A second surgery quickly followed to tack down the right diaphragm so it moved in tandem with the left.

When Brandon was nine months, Hanson moved her family to Detroit and began taking him to the U-M Medical Center. At 14 months, he underwent back-to-back surgeries. He was a little baby with a big heart defect. Hanson defined the problem in dictionary terms: "Transposition of the great vessel with double outlet right ventricle plus ventricular septal defect and pulmonary atresia."

"There were no specific procedures for his defects," she said. "But in his case, they were trying anything to keep him alive."

Three weeks later, Brandon went into a "third-degree heart block." A pacemaker was implanted, and things went smoothly until he was 19 months. Then, while visiting family in New Orleans, Brandon developed severe breathing problems and could not stay awake. Mother and son flew back to U-M on a survival jet.

The prospect of a heart transplant loomed, but doctors feared scar tissue and a build-up of antigens would not make Brandon a good candidate. They were mistaken. When they tested his rejection factor, it was zero on a scale of 0-15. "It was like a miracle," said Hanson. "They expected it to be 15."

Brandon went on a donor list at noon July 28, 1995. By 4 a.m. the following day, he had a heart, and by 7 a.m. he was in surgery. Twelve hours later, for the first time in his short life, Brandon had a healthy heart. "He bounced back within a month. We went home happy campers," said Hanson.

A second transplant

Three years after his first transplant, Brandon's body began to reject the heart. This time, the wait for a new heart was a bit longer, two months. On Sept. 17, 1998, Brandon received his second heart, another gift of life. "So far since this second heart, we've had nothing, no rejection. Every biopsy has been coming back clean," said Hanson.

Last year, Brandon participated in "Just Zoo It," a 5K run and walk sponsored by the Michigan Coalition on Donation to raise money for organ and tissue transplants. "He huffed and he puffed, but he made it," said Hanson.

This year Brandon hopes to participate as a member of Team Michigan in the U.S. Transplant Games June 21-24 at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla. Hanson, who works at the Allen Park Post Office and is taking classes to become a paramedic, has been working overtime to raise the money.

"Brandon was working to run the 50-yard dash, but we don't know if we can make it."

Music of the hearts

Six-year-old drummer lives because two families gave gifts of love

Even if Brandon doesn't get to run in the U.S. Transplant Games, he'll continue helping Hanson create awareness of organ donation. "He's quite the talker," she said.

Heart transplant surgeon

Dr. Alvis Bernabei is director of thoracic organ transplantation for the Henry Ford Health System. In February, he did five heart transplants in five days - perhaps a record for any major organ transplantation center.

"When you're doing it, you don't realize how much work you're doing," he said.

Early heart transplant patients did not survive very long because of problems with rejection. However, a breakthrough in the late 1970s with the development of an immuno-suppressive drug called cyclosporine increased survival. Based on Gift of Life statistics from 1996, the one-year survival rate for heart recipients is over 82 percent. (For kidney recipients it's almost 96 percent; for liver recipients, it's more than 77 percent.)

However, the problem remains finding a donor who matches in blood type and organ size and who is free of viruses. The donor-recipient age ratio is not a factor. A heart from an 18-year-old can be transplanted into a 65-year-old man, said Bernabei. "Statistically, the younger donors contribute better organs. As a person gets older, there's more of a chance of something wrong."

If the donor is over 40, a cardiac catheterization and echo cardiogram must be done to ensure there is no cardiac disease. Hearts from donors over 55 are not accepted, he added.

There are restrictions for recipients as well. They must have no significant disease processes, such as cancer or diabetes, and they must be able to sustain the rigors of the transplant. "They must be able to maintain lifelong immuno-suppressive medications and undergo routine biopsies of the heart," said Bernabei.

He views heart transplants as the last possible solution to a problem. "For some people, they have deteriorated so much there's nothing left to offer them except a heart or lung transplant. This is their only opportunity to regain their former lifestyle."

He related a success story about one of his patients, a 37-year-old mother of two who had been bedridden with heart failure for over a year. After her transplant, "she was able to walk up and down the (hospital) hallways within months."

Although hesitant to cite statistics, Bernabei said 60 percent of heart recipients are still alive after 10 years and 60 percent of lung recipients are alive after five years. But these percentages represent a continuum. The fact is, transplant patients can live a long time.

Bernabei remains in awe of medicine's ability to transplant the heart from a once-living donor into the body of a living recipient. "It truly is a miracle," he said. "Yet, the average person is not aware of the miracle of organ donation."

"A lot of people on the waiting list die," he said.

Michigan Donor Cards

Eighteen months ago, the Secretary of State began an enrollment card program, making it easier for residents to place their name on the Michigan Donor Registry. The registry is maintained by the Gift of Life Agency in Ann Arbor.

The donor registry is a 24-hour computerized database with names of people who have indicated they wish to be an organ or tissue donor upon their deaths.

Every driver license and identification card mailed from the Secretary of State's office includes a pre-printed, postage-paid enrollment card. People can sign the card and drop it in the mail. The information is then forwarded to the Gift of Life Agency.

In January, the Secretary of State expanded the enrollment program. People can now place their name on the donor registry online through the department's Web site at www.sos.state.mi.us.

Since the enrollment program began, more than 190,000 names have been added to the Michigan Donor Registry.

People interested in obtaining a donor registry card or more information on organ donors can contact Gift of Life Agency at (800) 482-4882.

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