

Check Your Vocabulary: Tips for Sensitive Language

Language plays an important role in the misconceptions and fears about organ and tissue donation. It is important for us to remember to keep the feelings of donor families in our mind when we write or talk about donation. As of May 2004, the following terminology was approved by the Association of Organ Procurement Organizations (AOPO) Donor Family Council.

Please use:

“Recover” organs or	instead of	“harvest” or
“Surgical Recovery” of organs		“harvesting” of organs

The public at large associates the word **“harvest”** with crops, crows, and combines. This word has a negative subtext when connected with donation. The word **“recovery”** helps people understand that the removal of a loved one’s organs for transplant is a respectable surgical procedure.

“Deceased Donor” or	instead of	“cadaver” or
“Deceased” Donation		“cadaveric”

Today, as more people choose to become living donors, there is a need to distinguish between living and **deceased** donors. 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.” It can be very difficult for donor families to hear their loved one spoken of in this regard.

“Mechanical Support” or	instead of	“Life Support”
“Ventilated 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 donation. The organs are perfused with oxygen for several hours through **“mechanical”** support. **“Mechanical”** or **“ventilated support”** are appropriate terms for the support given a deceased person in the event of organ donation.