The Gift of Life: Using Simulation to Impact Organ Donation

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BACKGROUND
Every 10 minutes, another name is added to the national organ transplant waiting list. Sadly, an average of 22 people die each day because the organs they need are not donated in time. Patients meeting either neurologic (brain death) or irreversible circulatory and respiratory criteria (donation following circulatory death – DCD) are potential organ donors. The incidence of DCD donations is increasing, with almost 15% of donations being DCD.

OBJECTIVES
• Refine the DCD process at Cone Health.
• Increase nurses’ knowledge, awareness, and advocacy of the DCD process.
• Enhance relationships between organ procurement organization (OPO) team members and nurses caring for DCD patients.

METHODS
Cone Health’s use of targeted temperature management following cardiac arrest and the number of DCD candidates has increased. Nurses felt ill equipped to care for these patients. The Critical Care Clinical Nurse Educator, Neuroscience Clinical Nurse Specialist, and Simulation Coordinator collaborated with Carolina Donor Services (CDS) to develop education to teach the DCD process.

• Multidisciplinary simulation was selected to engage participants in all learning domains.
• The scenario followed a patient from identification of a potential donor to reading the Moment of Honor (see graphic) and finally, the beginning of the surgical procedure in the OR.

OUTCOMES
• Following each simulation, the DCD process has been modified based on feedback from both RNs and the OPO participants.
• Nurses report a strong working knowledge of the DCD process and OPO team member roles.
• Nurses have the knowledge and confidence to address misconceptions and myths about organ donation and DCD process.
• Several bedside nurses have become advocates for DCD and organ donation in general.
• Nurses and DCS members report enhanced cooperation and communication with each other.

Incidental Results
• Other health systems have instituted a similar simulation process based on this work.
• Participating in the Moment of Honor, nurses gained a better appreciation for the Gift of Life.
• Participating as family members has increased nurses’ empathy and compassion for family members of DCD patients.
• To promote a healthy workplace environment, Cone Health supports sending 2 nurses to the OR for withdrawal of life support. This results in quality care for the patient and emotional support for the nurses.
• During the simulation, nurses learned the existing eye care practices limited the number of corneas accepted for donation. Subsequently, education related to proper eye care was developed and implemented.
• Two Cone Health hospitals received the UNOS Platinum Award for Organ Donation Promotion, their highest honor.

DISCUSSION
This simulation activity teaches the DCD process, strengthens the team, and focuses on the emotions of the donor family and staff involved. Cone Health continues to provide regular DCD simulations to maintain our status as a center of excellence for organ donation. Nurses leave the simulations enthusiastic and energized to be champions for organ donation, appreciating the breadth of the process. Carolina Donor Services, our OPO, has partnered with Cone Health to use simulation to educate their own staff.

Simulation is being used across the health system to improve other patient care processes such as prone positioning of ventilated patients, coordination of care across departments for septic patients, and ICU emergency thoracotomy following heart surgery.

NURSING IMPLICATIONS
Nurses play a vital role in the organ donation process. Caring for organ donation patients requires specialized nursing knowledge and an emotional investment in the patient and family. Using a simulation such as this, nurses engage in the knowledge, psychomotor, and affective domains. Participation in organ donation, a wonderful Gift of Life, is an honor for all involved.