

## **Spreading the word about organ donation**

**by Laura O'Melia, MSN, RN, CPNP, CCTC**

Come April, most parents are focused on spring vacation, or even starting to think about the end of the school year. But while the mom in me is making plans to keep my two sons busy over break, I'm also gearing up for another important event: April is National Donate Life Month.

As the director of transplant nursing in the Pediatric Transplant Center at Boston Children's Hospital, I'm committed to spreading the word about organ donation. But, perhaps like you, I wasn't always very knowledgeable about this topic. Early in my nursing career, I knew little about it — I didn't know anyone who needed a transplant and, I'm embarrassed to admit, I wasn't registered as an organ donor.

### **Changing — and saving — lives**

All that changed when I started working in the intensive care unit at Boston Children's twenty years ago. There, I cared for children who had received organ transplants and saw firsthand the lifechanging — and often lifesaving — impact on these kids and their families.

At the same time, I worked with potential donor candidates and their families. These were the parents and caregivers of dying children, who were faced with the unimaginable decision to donate their organs. Even in their profound grief, these families saw the opportunity to change another child's life. I remain humbled by these gifts and knew that I needed to devote my career to honoring them.

### **Spreading the word**

Today, I'm a pediatric nurse practitioner and nursing director specializing in transplant, as well as the mother of two boys. My sons, Brendan and Matthew, are both students at Collicot Elementary School. Even though I've always felt a mission to care for every child and family, my personal commitment grew even deeper after I became a mom. I knew that I needed to do even more to spread the word about organ donation.

That's why I'm partnering with Boston Children's and New England Donor Services for the next month to share information about organ donation with my fellow parents. No one wants to imagine the circumstances in which we would need to make that decision, but it's truly the greatest gift we can give. If you're not already an organ donor, I encourage you to sign up at [registerme.org/campaign/bch](https://registerme.org/campaign/bch). It's quick, simple — and you could change a person's life.

### **SIDEBAR: Did You Know...**

- One person can save up to 8 lives thru organ donation
- 115,000 children and adults are currently waiting for an organ transplant

- Another person is added to the transplant waiting list every 10 minutes
- 20 people die each day waiting for an organ transplant
- About 36,500 organ transplants occurred in 2018