

Discussions should start earlier to increase pediatric organ donations, expert says

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About 1,900 U.S. children are waiting for a lifesaving organ transplant. A University of Texas at Arlington expert said that number can be lowered though more patient education—starting in the pediatrician's office.

Kristin Gigli, assistant professor of nursing in the College of Nursing

and Health Innovation and an expert in pediatric nurse practitioner practice, is co-author of a new [American Academy of Pediatrics policy](#) that underscores the important role pediatricians and other [health professionals](#) have in guiding patients and families alike through the [organ donation](#) and transplantation process.

The policy update focuses on [opportunities](#) for pediatricians to educate patients and families about organ donation, with the goal of increasing their willingness to donate.

"Current policy was not reflecting the role of primary care in helping support the transplant and organ donation process. Their value is so important," she said. "If a pediatrician has seen a child grow up and they are going to get their driver's license, for example, that could be a time to bring up making a decision to become an organ donor. That kind of relationship can facilitate a potential opportunity to increase the number of organ donors."

Most organ donation discussions typically occur during end-of-life care, Gigli said. When looking at revising the [policy](#), she and her team convened a group of hospital employees with experience in the transplant process. They acknowledged that it can be difficult for hospital employees to be the first to mention organ donation and that earlier involvement from more primary care providers can ease that burden.

"There's evidence from other countries, where organ donation is much more part of the community conversation," Gigli said. "We wanted to adapt that international experience and build it into improving transplantation rates here. We really need to work to increase organ donation rates so that fewer kids are dying."

Provided by University of Texas at Arlington

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