

Minnesota Industry Leader Advances Organ Donation Capabilities Abroad

LifeSource CEO to create a roadmap for South Africa at September 4-5 workshop

MINNEAPOLIS (August 2019) – [LifeSource](#) founder and CEO Susan Gunderson – who has devoted the last 30 years of her career to advancing organ donation – will host a workshop in South Africa from September 4 -5 to help the country replicate the successful donation and allocation system we have here in the United States. Also president of the [International Society for Organ Donation and Procurement](#), Gunderson will bring international expertise to this workshop with healthcare providers, government authorities, nurses and transplant leaders as they create a national strategy roadmap to improve organ donation in South Africa.

The United States is a global leader with a [donation rate of 33.2 donors per million population](#). Conversely, South Africa, at approximately 1.4 donors per million population, has among the lowest rates in developed countries. While South Africa pioneered some advancements in organ transplantation – most notably [the world's first human heart transplant in 1967](#) – the country remains challenged by persistently low organ donation rates and poor access to transplantation for the majority of the country.

Thanks to Gunderson's leadership, LifeSource donation rates are at the highest level ever – a 22 percent year-over-year increase in individual organ donors and a 27 percent increase in organs transplanted. This August, a record 70 percent of Minnesotans have documented their choice by opting-in via their driver's, fishing or hunting license or online. The national average is only 58 percent. These gains reflect generous individuals saying yes to donation and sharing the gift of life, and to hospital partners who advocate for patients and their decisions to donate.

"We are relentlessly pursuing the day where everyone who needs a life-saving organ transplant, gets one," said Gunderson. "Improving systems around the world means more gifts are available for transplant and more lives are saved, getting us closer to that goal. My international efforts reflect a vision that all countries should achieve self-sufficiency with donation programs to meet the transplant needs of their residents."

Last month, Minnesotans heard the story of Lola Bond, a 16-month-old Minnesota girl who received a life-saving heart transplant. Our community watched as the donor's mother listened to her son's heartbeat once again in Lola's chest; the heart she heroically chose to donate following her son's tragic death. Right now, in many places around the world, the hope for a life-saving transplant is extremely dim. Gunderson's efforts intend to change that.

How Organ Donation Works in the United States

There are 58 non-profit organ procurement organizations (OPOs) in the United States responsible for the evaluation and procurement of deceased-donor organs for transplantation. Each OPO is responsible

– more –

for a designated region. They work upstream, prior to transplantation in three main areas:

1. **Donor family support:** Having direct contact with the hospital and family of the recently deceased donor, guiding them through the donation process. The OPO provides the family with information about donation so they can make that decision if the deceased hadn't already documented their choice through their driver's or fishing/hunting license or on the online state registry (DonateLifeMN.org) or the federal registry (RegisterMe.org). Support continues post donation in the form of memorial opportunities, facilitating communication with the donor's recipient(s) and creating a community with others who've shared the same experience.
2. **Recipient matching and organ recovery:** Working with United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) to identify the best matched transplant candidate for the available organs, recovering the organs and coordinating with the surgical team of each organ recipient.
3. **Public awareness to encourage opting-in:** OPOs are also charged with educating the public to increase awareness of and participation in the organ donation process. Gunderson's organization, LifeSource, is running a massive "[Check the Box](#)" campaign and also a "[Talk Donation](#)" campaign to encourage all communities in the legacy of life.

About Susan Gunderson and LifeSource

Since 1989 Susan Gunderson has dedicated her career to saving lives through organ, eye and tissue donation as founder and CEO of LifeSource. LifeSource is the federally designated organ procurement organization for Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota that saves lives and offers hope and healing through donation and transplantation. LifeSource is widely recognized as a leader in innovation and best practice in organ donation.

Gunderson has held national and international leadership positions, including President, [Association of Organ Procurement Organizations](#) and President, [International Society for Organ Donation and Procurement](#); Board director for multiple organizations including the [United Network for Organ Sharing](#), the [Alliance for Organ Donation and Transplantation](#), [HHS Advisory Committee on Organ Transplantation](#), and the [Musculoskeletal Transplant Foundation](#).

Since 1996 her international experience has included a faculty appointment with the University of Barcelona, Transplant Procurement Management (TPM) advanced international training course on transplant coordination, and co-director of the Global Leadership Symposium.

Gunderson has a strong commitment to community involvement and currently serves on the St. Olaf College Board of Regents and the University of Minnesota Medicine and Health Board of Overseers. She received her Bachelor's degree from St. Olaf College and a Masters of Healthcare Administration from the University of Washington.

Learn more at life-source.org.

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