Dictionary of Organ Donation and Transplantation Terms

**acute rejection**: The body’s attempt to destroy the transplanted organ. Acute rejection usually occurs in the first year after transplant.

**adverse reaction**: An unintended side effect of a drug or procedure.

**allocation**: The process of determining how organs are distributed, based on policies and guidelines to make sure organs are distributed fairly.

**allograft**: An organ or tissue that is transplanted from one human to another human.

**antibody**: A protein substance made by the body’s immune system to attack a foreign substance, sometimes, unfortunately, they attack transplanted organs.

**antigen**: A foreign substance that triggers the body to try to destroy it.

**anti-rejection drugs (immunosuppressive drugs)**: Drugs that reduce the body’s ability to reject the transplanted organ.

**arteriogram**: An x-ray of an artery after a dye has been injected.

**ascites**: A buildup of fluid in the abdomen usually associated with liver disease.

**biopsy**: The removal of a tiny piece of tissue from the body for examination under a microscope. This is done to diagnose rejection of a transplanted organ.

**blood vessels**: The veins, arteries, and capillaries through which blood flows.

**brain death**: The irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem. Brain death is not the same as a coma or persistent vegetative state.

**cadaver**: A dead body.
**cardiac**: Related to the heart.

**cardiac death**: The irreversible stopping of all heart, blood circulation, and breathing functions.

**chronic**: A condition that develops slowly and lasts for a long time, or entire lifetime.

**chronic rejection**: Slow failure of the transplanted organ.

**cirrhosis**: A disease of the liver in which normal, healthy tissue is replaced with nonfunctioning tissue, and healthy, functioning liver cells are lost.

**cold ischemia time**: The time an organ is without blood circulation from the time of removal of the organ from the donor to the time the organ is transplanted into the recipient.

**compliance**: (also referred to as adherence) Following instructions of the medical team, such as taking prescribed medications, following diet or fluid restrictions, etc.

**congenital**: Refers to a condition present at birth

**corticosteroid**: A hormone produced by the body but given as a synthetic (man made) medicine to suppress your body’s normal reaction to infection and foreign tissue.

Prednisone is a common corticosteroid.

**crossmatching**: A blood test performed before the transplant to see if the potential recipient will react poorly to the donor organ.

**cyclosporine**: A drug used to prevent rejection of the transplanted organ by suppressing the body’s defense system.

**deceased donor**: A person who has been declared dead and whose organ or organs and/or tissues used for transplantation.
delayed function: A condition in which the transplanted organ does not work well right after the transplant.

dialysis: The use of a machine to correct the balance of fluids and chemicals in your body and to remove wastes from your body when your kidneys are failing.

diastolic blood pressure: The bottom number in your blood pressure which indicates the pressure in the arteries when the heart is at rest.

disability: A considerable limitation in major life activity that cannot be helped with the use of a corrective device or medication.

donor: Someone from whom an organ or tissue is removed for transplantation.

donor card: A document that indicates your wish to be an organ donor.

donor pool: A group of people eligible to donate an organ.
edema: Swelling caused when the body retains too much fluid, also called ‘water weight.’

end-stage organ disease: A disease that leads to permanent failure of an organ.

end-stage renal disease or chronic kidney failure:

experimental: New treatments, procedures, or drugs that are being tested.

foreign body: A thing that enters the body that is not supposed to be there, such as a germ, or a transplanted organ.

fulminant: Happening very quickly and with intensity.

fungal disease: An infection that often occurs in patients during treatment with steroids or immunosuppresants.

genetic: Relating to heredity, birth, or origin.

gingival hypertrophy: Enlargement of the gums.
glomerular filtration rate: A measurement of kidney function used to determine the severity of kidney disease.

graft: A transplanted organ or tissue.

graft survival rate: The percentage of patients who have functioning transplanted organs at a certain point in time.

hemodialysis: A treatment for kidney failure whereby the patient’s blood is passed through a machine to remove excess fluid and wastes.

hemorrhage: A rapid loss of a large amount of blood; excessive bleeding.

hepatic: Relating to the liver.

hepatitis: An inflammation of the liver that can lead to liver failure.

high blood pressure: High blood pressure occurs when the force of the blood pushing against the walls of the blood vessels is higher than normal because the blood vessels have either become less able to stretch or have gotten smaller.

hirsutism: An excessive increase of hair growth. It is a common side effect of some drugs and can be controlled with waxing, hair removal products or shaving.

human leukocyte antigens: Molecules found on the surface of white blood cells in the body that characterize each person as unique.

immune response: The body’s natural defense against foreign objects or organisms, such as bacteria, viruses, or transplanted organs or tissues.

immune system: The organs, tissues, cells and cell products in the body that work to find and destroy foreign substances, such as viruses.

immunosuppression: The artificial suppression of the immune response, usually through drugs, so that the body will not reject a transplanted organ or tissue.
**immunosuppressive**: Relating to the weakening or reducing of the immune system’s responses to foreign material.

**infection**: A condition that occurs when foreign substance enters the body, causing the immune system to fight the intruder.

**inflammation**: The swelling, heat and redness the body produces when it has an injury or infection.

**informed consent**: The process of reaching an agreement based on a full disclosure and full understanding of what will take place.

**inpatient treatment**: Treatment in the hospital involving at least one overnight stay.

**intensive care unit**: A unit in the hospital that has specialized monitoring devices and equipment for the care of seriously ill patients.

**intravenous**: Within a vein or veins, usually refers to medication or fluids.

**investigational**: A drug or procedure that is in a research phase and has not yet been approved for patient use by the FDA.

**kidneys**: A pair of organs that maintain fluid balance and remove wastes from your body through the production of urine.

**leukocyte**: A white blood cell.

**liver**: Organ responsible for the conversion of nutrients into usable substances.

**living donor**: A person who donates a kidney or a part of their liver to someone else.

**mail-order pharmacy**: A pharmacy that provides medicines and medical supplies via the mail, often at reduced costs and affiliated with the transplant hospital.

**match**: The degree of likeness between the donor and the recipient.

**mortality**: Death.
**multiple listing:** Being on the organ transplant waiting list at more than one transplant facility.

**National Organ Transplant Act:** A 1984 act that outlawed the sale of human organs and tissues, and established a national database for organ sharing.

**noncompliance:** Not following instructions of the medical team, such as not taking medications.

**nonfunction:** A condition in which a transplanted organ fails to start working after being transplanted.

**OPO:** Organ Procurement Organization

**OPO service area:** The organ procurement organization that is responsible for coordinating organ donation and educating the public about donation in a specific geographical area.

**OPTN:** Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (see below)

**organ:** A part of the body, made up of various types of tissues, that performs a particular function.

**organ donation:** To give an organ to someone in need of that organ, or to have your organs removed for transplantation after your death.

**organ preservation:** Donated organs require special methods of preservation to keep them viable between removal and transplantation.

**organ procurement or organ recovery:** The act of surgically removing an organ from a donor for transplantation.
**Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network**: The organization that administers the nation’s organ sharing system (a national database that matches donated organs to recipients) and ensures that organs are allocated in a fair and just manner.

**organ procurement organization**: Organizations that serve as a link between the donor and the recipient and are responsible for the identification of donors and the removal, preservation and transplantation of organs for transplantation.

**outpatient care (ambulatory care)**: Medical testing or treatment done without an overnight hospital stay, performed in a hospital or a physician’s office.

**pancreas**: The organ that secretes digestive enzymes as well as insulin for blood sugar metabolism.

**panel reactive antibody**: A blood test used to find out how a potential organ recipient will react to a donor organ.

**pool**: A group of people with a similar characteristic or function.

**potential transplant recipient**: A transplant candidate who has been ranked by the OPTN computer match program as the person to whom an organ from a specific deceased organ donor is offered.

**procurement**: The surgical procedure of removing donated organs or tissue.

**pulmonary**: Related to the lungs.

**recipient**: A person who receives an organ or tissue transplant.

**recovery or retrieval**: The procedure of removing cells, tissues or organs from a donor for the purpose of transplantation.

**rejection**: The process by which the body’s immune system recognizes transplanted tissue or organ as foreign and tries to destroy it.
renal: Related to the kidneys.

re-transplantation: Because of rejection or failure of a transplanted organ, some patients receive another transplant after being put back on the waiting list.

second opinion: A medical opinion provided by a second physician after one physician has provided a diagnosis to an individual.

sensitized: Having antibodies in the blood, which means a potential recipient will react against a greater number of potential organ offers.

side effect: An unintended reaction to a drug.

status: A waiting list code that is used to indicate the degree of medical urgency for patients awaiting transplants, such as Status A or Status 7.

steroids: Natural substances found in the body to help control important functions. Man-made (or synthetic) catabolic steroids are used to suppress your immune system.

survival rates: The number that indicates what percentage of patients are still living or organs functioning after a certain amount of time.

systolic blood pressure: The top number of the blood pressure measurement. It measures the maximum pressure exerted when the heart contracts.

thoracic: Related to the heart, lungs, or chest.

tissue: A general term for transplantable parts of the body other than organs; includes bones, tendons, ligaments, corneas, heart valves, skin, veins, and some nerves.

tissue typing: Done in a laboratory, a procedure to determine the genetic makeup of an organ donor.

transplant, transplantation: Transfer of an organ or tissue from one person’s body into another person’s body to replace a diseased or failed organ or tissue.
**transplant candidate**: An individual who has been identified as medically suited to benefit from an organ transplant and has been placed on the waiting list by the transplant program.

**transplant physician**: A physician who provides nonsurgical care and treatment to transplant patients before and after transplant.

**transplant program**: A department within a transplant hospital that provides transplantation of a particular type of organ.

**transplant recipient**: A person who has received an organ transplant.

**transplant surgeon**: A physician who performs transplants and provides surgical care to transplant recipients.

**United Network of Organ Sharing**: The non-profit organization that administrates and maintains the country’s organ transplant waiting list through the government.

**varices (esophageal)**: The swollen veins at the bottom of the esophagus, a common condition caused by increased pressure in the liver that can ulcerate and bleed.

**vascular**: Referring to blood circulation and blood vessels.

**ventilator**: A machine that forces air into the patient’s respiratory system when the patient is not able to breathe properly.

**virus**: A collection of tiny infectious organisms that grow and reproduce themselves while living in cells in the body.

**waiting list**: A national computerized list of patients who are currently waiting for an organ transplant.

This list is not intended to be a complete list of terms associated with the organ donation process and transplantation. If you are not sure what someone is talking about, please ask them to explain it to you. It is your right to know about your health care.

World Health Organization: Global Glossary of Terms and Definitions on Donation and Transplantation