

In death, my daughter helped save four lives

C Gopinath

Donation of organs is a noble act. It's an option given to the family of a patient declared brain-dead. But we hardly ever discuss organ donation, or even death.

That's until the passing of a loved one brings down your entire world.

My family is not an exception — we never spoke about organ donation. My daughter, Ishwarya Chinnakonda, was a healthy young girl, but when she was declared brain-dead on August 22, 2016, following a sudden brain haemorrhage — on the day of Raksha Bandhan — I suddenly found myself in the unenviable position to decide on organ donation.

Being a scientist and having read about it in newspapers, I knew the importance of organ donation. Although my brain consented, it was different story with my heart. We held a few rounds of discussion with the medical team. It was also my responsibility to convince other members of the family. Eventually, we agreed.

POINT OF VIEW

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But it's what our Ishwarya would have wanted. For as long as we can remember, the girl was all about helping people. She was kind, helpful and resourceful. Every decision she ever made, took into consideration the happiness of others. We believe her soul was in full agreement — she was able to save four lives.

If any reader happens to land in a similar situation, he or she must understand the time-sensitive nature of the issue. There are hardly a few days — few hours in some cases — in which decisions to donate organs must be taken.

A significant number of road accidents and severe head-injury cases end in brain-death. In such a situation, it is understandable for

TOI REPORT ON AUGUST 13, 2017

Brain-dead Pune teenager gives life to four people

It was in August last year. Pune's Balewadi School's internal exam for Class XII had just started. "Please wake me up at 5am for study," said 16-year-old Aishwarya to her father before going to sleep. Minutes later, she collapsed. By the time she was moved to a hospital, 40% of her brain was damaged. It was a brain haemorrhage. Surgery failed to revive her. She was declared brain-dead three days later.

Ishwarya Chinnakonda was declared brain dead in August 2016. A year later, her story appeared in a TOI report on organ donation

nior scientist with Pune-based National Chemical Laboratory.

Aishwarya's parents were counselled for organ donation. "It was difficult. But I made up my mind and, me and my wife signed the consent form," he said. "She would always top in academics. She was very active and would love watching sparrows."

The family donated her heart, kidneys, liver and corneas. The donation gave life to four na-

Spain tops the list in organ donation.

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the near and dear ones to be highly emotional. For many, it is almost impossible to accept brain-death when the patient's heart is still beating. They may consider second or third opinions from other experts. But know that declaring a patient brain-dead requires rigorous procedure. It includes independent validation from medical experts of other hospitals.

With the right organ, a recipient can have a much-improved quality of life. But at any given time, a few thousand patients are waiting for a suitable organ across any city. A survey by Donatelifindia revealed that of 1.5 lakh people, who were waiting for a kidney transplant in 2014, only 3,000 were lucky to get the right organ. Due to the abysmally low organ donation figures in India, very few on the wait-list are able to get back to their normal lives.

Despite scientific advances, rational thinking and general awareness, many of us are unwilling to agree to or-

gan donation due to various reasons—(false) religious beliefs, inability to take a decision, emotions etc. Here, I would like to say that those who donate organs, are helping others, even in death. They become immortal.

Today, we spend thousands to secure and retain life insurance policies that will benefit next of kin in the event of a fatal accident. Nobody wants the fatal accident to happen, but we still discuss the possibility. We could apply the same logic to the discussion on organ donation.

Spain tops the list in organ donation. Statistic for 2016 was 434 donors/crore population. Apart from medical expertise, public awareness too is very high in Spain. In fact, Spain uses an "opt-out" system, in which citizens are compulsorily registered for the organ donation, unless they choose otherwise. France too adopted this model in 2017.

India, with a population of 1.3 billion, lags behind at 2.6 donors/crore population. Croatia is smaller in size than Maharashtra, but is 100 times better than India in organ donation terms.

So my dear readers, let's all at least start a dialogue on organ donation now — with friends, family and colleagues. The life we lost, could save another.

The writer is a scientist at the National Chemical Laboratory, Pune