



LIVE ON: Supporters of the KZN Organ Donor Foundation at the Family Fun Walk, held to raise awareness of organ and tissue donation in Organ Donor Month.

PICTURE: LEIGH WATSON

You can save lives, sign up now

TANYA WATERWORTH

DURBAN came out in support of Organ Donor Month last weekend with 1500 people turning up and raring to go for the Family Fun Walk from Suncoast Casino on the beachfront.

There is a desperate shortage of organ donors in South Africa, particularly KwaZulu-Natal and according to the Organ Donor Foundation, there are only around 300 lifesaving solid organ transplants (heart, lungs, liver, kidney, pancreas) performed annually and around 200 tissue transplants.

"This is as a result of a lack of organ donors and not difficulty in finding a match. This is a shocking statistic considering the number of deaths in South Africa annually," said foundation executive director, Samantha Nicholls.

A single donor can save up to seven lives through organ donation, while donated tissue can help another 50 recipients.

And whether it's IT legend Steve Jobs who received a liver transplant in 2009, extending his working life and giving the world the iPad, or a village child burned beyond recognition who would face certain death without donor skin, organ and tissue donation saves lives daily.

Becoming a donor is very easy, it does not cost anything and starts with registration which only takes a few minutes.

Start the registration process by either calling the toll free line on 0800 22 66 11 or go to the website which is www.odf.org.za.

Once registered, you will receive an organ donor card to

fill in and keep in your wallet, and organ donor stickers to place on your driver's licence and ID book. This will either come via post or electronically by e-mail. It is important to have the card and stickers so that you can be identified as an organ donor after your death.

More important, you must tell your family that you are an organ donor as they will ultimately have to give consent to organ donation. Ask them to honour your wish, and encourage them to become organ donors too.

Nicholls said absolutely anyone could sign up to become an organ donor, regardless of age or medical history. Suitability for organ donation is established by the medical professionals at the time of death after a series of very comprehensive tests.

Solid organs that can be donated are heart, lungs, liver, kidney and pancreas. All organs are in high demand however, it is kidneys which are in the highest demand. Kidneys are in increasingly high demand as a result of lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

It is important to note that tissue can also be donated and is also in very high demand. Tissue includes bone, skin, cornea and heart valves.

According to the foundation, neither the organ donor nor the donor family incur any cost at all. It is free to register as an organ donor and the costs of the procurement of the organs are covered by the state or the recipient's medical aid, so the donor's family will not incur any costs after giving consent for organ donation.