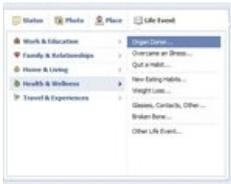


FACEBOOK USES ITS WIDE REACH TO SPREAD ORGAN-DONATION AWARENESS



Facebook has declared the release of a new aspect on its pages that can add the information of your decision to become an organ donor, along with details of about, how, when and where, the inspiration to become one, came from. Facebook users can now enlist as organ donors via links to official donor organizations. The new feature has been well-received and is being much-admired as a commendable public service initiative by the social media giant. Mark Zuckerberg said that the inspiration came from his friendship with Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, who underwent a kidney transplant, prior to his death last year. His girlfriend Priscilla Chan, who is a medical student, was another reason that spurred him on. He said during an interview that her face would lit up when she came from hospital and told him about a body-organ being made available, to give a second chance at living, to someone who was anxiously awaiting it. It apprised him of the fact that there was a huge shortage of organs. According to United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), the organization that runs the nation's transplant system, there are more than 114,000 Americans presently on waiting-lists for transplants of kidneys, livers, hearts and other organs. More than 6,600 died last year waiting for an organ. Facebook believes that the new feature will create more responsiveness and understanding towards the lack of organs available worldwide. The new feature on Facebook is basically to use its wide reach, to spread awareness of the seriousness of the issue and above all to inform your family members of your intentions, to enable them to grant consent if and when the occasion arises. However, the decision to post such information has raised issues of privacy and legality as such medical information on Facebook is not protected by US laws, which require those in the know of such personal data, to keep it confidential. Deven McGraw, director of the Health Privacy Project at the Center for Democracy and Technology in Washington said, "Consumers need to be hyper-aware about managing their own privacy for this information, as it can be used against them. The sensitivity of health information underscores the need for there to be some baseline regulations on privacy protection to guard people." Tim Mackinen, spokesman for Gift of Life Michigan, the state's organ and tissue recovery program, while confirming that Facebook's declaration was legal, called it, "an incredible way to spread the message." "Half of America is on Facebook," he said. In Michigan alone there are 3000 persons awaiting organs for transplant. Mackinen assured prospective donors that, "Under the state's Uniform Anatomical Gift Law, making a declaration to be an organ donor -- whether on a driver's license, on Facebook, in a will, or in an advanced directive -- is just as good as being on the state's organ donation registry, he said. With Facebook's declarative nature, he said, telling friends you want to donate is tantamount to putting a heart on your license." To ensure privacy, Facebook users can set their organ donor status, to various levels of privacy, ensuring that for others to gain access to that information; they can only do so by using a password, or through a friend who has access to that page. Since the announcement, thousands of organ donors have signed up. Donate Life America, an organization that promotes donations and is now working with Facebook, said that more than 6000 people had enrolled through 22 registries. David Fleming, chief executive of Donate Life America, in a statement said, the response "dwarfs any past organ donation initiative.