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Nurses help families to make the ultimate gift

With kindness, gentleness and compassion during the most difficult of times, South Western Sydney Local Health District's donation specialist nurses help families give the gift of life.

Clinical Nurse Consultants for organ and tissue donation, Venessa Sposari and Vanessa Palmer, provide information and support to help families through the organ donation process after the death of a loved one.

The specially trained nurses will be attending information and donor registration stalls across south western Sydney to raise awareness of the need for organ and tissue donation during DonateLife Week from 29 July to 5 August.

There are more than 1400 people across Australia on waiting lists for a life-saving or life-transforming transplant, according to the Organ and Tissue Authority.

Both nurses encouraged community members to have conversations with their loved ones about organ donation and register with the Organ and Tissue Authority as donors.

"Organ donation is the ultimate gift because it saves lives and transforms lives," Ms Sposari said.

"DonateLife Week is an opportunity for us to raise awareness in the community about the importance of organ donation."

Ms Palmer said educating community members and health professionals about organ donation as well as assisting bereaved families and friends, were important parts of her role.

"It is a special privilege to help support the families, both during and after the donation," Ms Palmer said.

"We follow up with the families in the days after the death of their loved one and post donation and stay in contact."

Ms Sposari said she always wanted to be in a profession focussed on helping people and changing lives.

"On my last clinical placement for my degree I was placed in the intensive care unit at Liverpool Hospital and from that point onwards I knew I wanted to work in intensive care and develop my career from there," she said.

To register as an organ and tissue donor or for more information visit www.donatelife.gov.au.

Case study

Two years ago Chris Nichols, 59, a resident of south western Sydney, didn't think he had a future – now he feels on top of the world.

The father of three and grandfather of six had been on the waiting list for two years when he received a liver and kidney transplant in April 2017.

"I was sick for a long time – about 20 years – and I had a combination of liver failure and diabetes," Mr Nichols said.

"I now feel the best I've felt in years. I'm incredibly grateful to have received the transplant. It has changed my life."

The former railway worker of 30 years was in surgery for 11 hours and spent 17 days recovering in hospital following the procedure.

"I take anti-rejection drugs every day and will do so for the rest of my life. It's not a problem when you consider the alternative," he said.

Mr Nichols and his wife of 34 years Michelle are advocates for organ donation.

"I wouldn't be here today feeling so well without it," he said.

"My wife Michelle promotes organ donation at her work and we encourage people to sign up as donors.

"Take the time to talk about becoming an organ donor with your family and friends. Organ donation saved my life and has saved many others too."

The NSW Government is committed to organ and tissue donation with its ongoing plan, *Increasing Organ Donation in NSW*.

Since the Plan's release in 2012, significant strategic partnerships with organisations including the NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service have led to a number of successful initiatives. These include the award winning 'Life Giving Stories' campaign and the renowned NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout, which have touched a number of diverse communities in NSW and led to an increase in registrations across the state on the Australian Organ Donor Register.

Note to media

A DonateLife Week information stall will be held on Monday 30 July from 10am to 2pm at Liverpool Hospital. Artwork from St John's Park High School will also be on display.

There will also be information stalls at Bankstown Hospital on Tuesday 31 July and at Bankstown Square on Wednesday 1 August, both from 10am to 4pm.