

Need for Transplant Organs Is Acute Among Blacks

Newark Congregation Hears Parent's Plea

By TINA KELLEY

NEWARK, Nov. 12 — Three times, the Waters family knew the bone-deep dread of losing their baby, Noble Tyre Waters, who had a severely diseased colon and needed a transplant.

After undergoing three transplants, Noble died five years ago at the age of 15 months.

"I can't begin to imagine the pain and agony for those families who were able to extend our son's life, but I can imagine the joy, when hope seemed not to exist, of being told three times that our son had gotten a reprieve," said Noble's father, Robert Kevin Waters, who sponsors a Little League team called the Life-savers to help spread the word about organ donations. "I want someone to feel that joy, because their loved one is given an extension of life because of a donor."

On Sunday, as part of National Donor Sabbath, Mr. Waters addressed about 100 people gathered here at the Pilgrim Baptist Church about the need for people to become donors.

At about 50 predominantly black churches around the country, members of the Links Inc., a national service group of professional black women, spoke about the need for more black organ donors.

The Links offers compelling statistics. Of the more than 93,000 people awaiting organ transplants, 27 percent are black, although blacks make

up only 12 percent of both the total population and the donor pool. Among people awaiting kidney transplants, 35 percent are black, due in part to high rates of diabetes and hypertension among blacks. And blacks made up almost a quarter of the 5,300 people who died last year waiting for a transplant.

Furthermore, transplants have a higher success rate when donors and recipients are genetically similar, the Links said.

In his sermon, the Rev. Clarence Thomas, pastor of Pilgrim Baptist Church, said that when people are asked to sign a donor card, "They don't hear life, they hear death."

He added, "A wall of silence and resistance goes up." As he said that, many of the congregants agreed, with amens and mm-hmmms.

"I'm glad someone had wisdom enough to bring this to the church," Mr. Thomas said, "for if anyone can bring down the wall, it is the church. It's going to take some marching, it's going to take some praying, it's going to take some shouting. But we who are the household of faith can bring this wall down."

Later, Mumtaz Bari-Brown, a member of the Links, spoke about her family's decision to donate the organs of her brother, Abdul Brown, 43, after he died of a stroke last year.

"To know that one person's organs and tissues can help more than 50 people made us sure it was the right decision," she said. "He is still help-



Dith Pran/The New York Times

Robert Kevin Waters, a campaigner for organ donations, with his wife at Pilgrim Baptist Church yesterday.

ing people, and that brings me comfort as I continue to grieve and to mourn him."

The congregation also heard from Garry Branch, 50, a trustee and choir member, who is awaiting a kidney transplant, and from Joan Lowther, whose 39-year-old son, Russell Gamble, was shot by three teenagers. She donated his corneas and bone tissue.

A study conducted this fall by the Links and the pharmaceutical company Roche said that half of black Americans would want to donate their organs upon their death, but most have not discussed the issue with their families. In some states, family members must sign forms to

allow organs to be donated, even if the donor had signed a donor card or indicated that wish on a driver's license.

The survey found that common reasons for not becoming a donor included distrust of the medical system and fear of organ removal before death.

Connie Bentley McGhee, a lawyer who attended the service here, said: "In an urban community like this, young black men are being killed at an alarming rate. There's a fear, with people thinking, 'Are they really going to take care of me to save my life, or are they going to be more concerned that my organs be given to

some other person?'"

The pastor's wife, Montrae Calhoun Thomas, a pediatrician, has heard similar concerns. "People are fearful, especially that they will not be taken care of well, and rushed to their death," she said. "That's not the case." Indeed, she said that potential donors are treated especially carefully, to protect their lives and the lives of future organ recipients.

Dale Britton of Montclair, whose wife, Leslie, donated a kidney to their daughter, Laureen, now 11, said he was moved to action by the church service. "I am going to sign up after this, after what I heard today," he said.