A Race Against Time

The process behind a donor’s generous gift to a blind or visually impaired recipient is a complex series of steps that require timely coordination between multiple stakeholders including hospital personnel, donor families, eye bank employees, coroners, funeral homes, and surgeons. The average time it took for us to recover, evaluate and prepare and distribute corneal tissue for surgery was just under 49 hours. The timeline presented here is meant to illustrate how a typical eye donation case plays out.

John Smith passes away after a long battle with cancer. A nurse calls the donor information line to determine if John is eligible to be a donor.

In addition to examining the cornea, RMLEB conducts blood tests to screen for communicable diseases and combs through both John’s medical charts and lab results from his time under medical care.

A hospital staff member, trained by RMLEB, speaks to John’s family to inform them of his eligibility for donation. If John signed up to be a donor, his family doesn’t have to make a decision. If he didn’t sign up, then his family is asked to decide on his behalf.

Meanwhile, a quality control coordinator examines the cornea’s physical condition under a slit-lamp microscope and then determines its endothelial cell count – a critical indicator of its health and transplantability – using a specular microscope.

A coroner can stop a donation if they think it may interfere with the ability to determine the cause of death. The eye bank can help the investigation by performing a thorough eye exam and collecting fluids from the eye for forensic testing. When this happens prior to the autopsy, the corneas are preserved sooner and transplant rates are higher.

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The mission of the Rocky Mountain Lions Eye Bank is to fulfill the wishes of eye donors and their families in order to help another overcome blindness through transplantation and research.

In the past fiscal year:

- 2,727 eye donors gave the gift of sight.
- 2,514 eye tissues were used in sight-restorative transplants and reconstruction.
- 328 eye tissues were used by RMLEB or other research centers to advance surgery techniques and innovations to fight blindness.

For a complete list of contributors, visit www.corneas.org/annualreport