VCA Transplants

WHAT IS A VCA TRANSPLANT?

VCA stands for Vascularized Composite Allograft organs. Vascular means vessels. VCA transplants involve multiple tissue types including skin, bone, nerves and blood vessels which are transplanted to a patient.

WHAT ARE TYPES OF VCA TRANSPLANTS?

The VCA transplants that you probably hear about most often are hand, arm and face transplants. But they can also include the larynx, genitalia and the abdominal wall.

WHY VCA TRANSPLANT VERSUS RECONSTRUCTIVE SURGERY OR ARTIFICIAL LIMBS?

VCA transplants can restore abilities and independence in ways that artificial limbs and surgery can't. These transplants can completely transform lives.

WILL A FACE RECIPIENT LOOK LIKE THEIR DONOR?

The answer is yes and no. Yes, skin characteristics such as moles, freckles and scars will transfer to the recipient. However, since the recipient's underlying bone structure is apt to be different from the donor's, any resemblance will likely be minimal. It's important to remember that VCA requires the matching of features such as skin tone, body size, hair color, and sometimes gender, between the donor and the recipient.

WHEN I SIGN UP AS AN ORGAN DONOR, AM I AGREEING TO DONATE MY HANDS AND FACE?

No, you're not authorizing a VCA donation when you sign up as an organ, tissue and cornea donor. Your family makes the decision about VCA donation after your death, so make sure your wishes are known.

HOW DOES A HAND OR ARM TRANSPLANT WORK?

The surgery is very complicated. Bones have to be connected to the arm; arteries and veins must be reattached; and tendons and nerves need to be repaired. The medical and surgical team can include dozens of professionals and take up to 16 hours to perform.

HOW DOES A FACE TRANSPLANT WORK?

These transplants also take teams of doctors and many hours to perform — how long depends on the recipient's injury or illness. For example, if the mouth and jaw need to be replaced, then teeth, bone, tongue, chin and skin might need to be transplanted, increasing the complexity of the process.

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