Title: 

A New Dawn: One hospital’s journey to honor the gift of donation

Purpose

Organ, tissue and cornea donation show an unwavering compassion and selflessness in the face of loss and tragedy. Families donate, or honor the decision made by their loved one to become a donor, in a time of profound grief and pain. Like donation, art has the potential for healing and transformation. Oakwood Hospital – Dearborn wanted to develop a unique donor memorial using glass and the symbol of the dove to create a space of reflection and meaning for those whose loved ones became donors and promote awareness of donation.

Method

- Oakwood Dearborn and Gift of Life Michigan partnered in 2010 to develop hospital memorial
- Extensive state-wide search conducted for Michigan based artist. The winning proposal was designed by A.J. Bellomo, an award winning multimedia artist with a personal knowledge of both donation and transplantation
- Memorial is a rounded wood structure containing panels of etched glass and carved wood. The glass panels enshrine individual glass doves, lit from behind with alternating blue and green lights. Carved into one of the wood panels is the quote “Faith is a bird that feels dawn breaking and sings while it is still dark”
- “A NEW DAWN: a tribute to those who have given the gift of life” is written across the top of the memorial
- Dedications to tissue and cornea donors and donation information will occur in an interactive electronic kiosk within the memorial in English, Spanish and Arabic
- Memorial complements the hospital’s inter-faith sanctuary situated directly opposite and creates a sacred space within the hospital
- Project is entirely self funded and included grants from the hospital and OPO foundations, Employee Giving Campaign contributions and individual gifts.

Result

The memorial was officially dedicated in November, 2014 and is being completed in two phases due to cost. Additional funds will be raised to purchase the doves necessary to complete the rookery and fund future upkeep of the memorial. The hospital is planning an annual ceremony where the families of organ donors will be invited to receive a dove etched with their loved one’s name. As might be expected, numerous challenges arose through the four plus years the hospital worked on the project. Factors leading to the project’s success include a close collaborative relationship between the hospital and Gift of Life, creative response to problems and setbacks and perhaps most importantly, an unwavering resolve to honor those whose loved ones gave the ultimate gift.
Conclusion

The memorial ultimately serves several complementary hospital goals: it provides an opportunity for a diverse community to learn about donation and transplantation, is a sacred space where grieving families can come to reflect upon a selfless decision to save and transform lives and also serves as a lasting legacy to honor the gift of life given in the face of unimaginable sorrow.