THE sound of my pager breaks the silence. A text message flashes in my pager: "Mr. John Doe is now a donor." An attempt by the resident doctor to keep me informed of my patients. This text would seem meaningless to anybody, but these words may potentially bring back a meaningful life for half a dozen souls.

Let me give a little background. Mr. John Doe was in the neurosurgical intensive care unit with head injury in a high-speed motor vehicle crash. His brain injury was extensive and the hope of a recovery was fading rapidly. In the morning I had a long conversation with the family that included the parents and the siblings. The family was in agreement that if there was no hope, the doctors might withdraw life support. They also inquired whether their son could donate his organs; those may save the lives of others.

Now, as soon as Mr. John Doe is declared brain dead, his status changes from being a patient to a donor.

An extremely organised donor agency then takes over the body. They work with supercomputer precision and speed. They keep the body viable for better organ harvest, do all the screening tests, an extensive computerised database starts searching for possible recipients, and organ harvests and transplantations are arranged. Organs are flown from coast to coast within minutes' notice to the matched recipients.

A team of surgeons, specialist nurses, and technicians will fly small private aircrafts within less than an hour notice. Time of the day or night, weather, holiday, even Christmas will not stop organ flights. Time is so important that while one organ starts its flight, another group of surgeons will already have put the proposed recipient under anesthesia and opened up the body and set it up for the transplant.

Several months ago, one such flight collecting a lung from my hospital crashed in Lake Michigan on its way to University of Michigan Hospital. All the six passengers including two brilliant transplant surgeons were killed in that accident. The proposed recipient was already under anesthesia, but opening of the body was stopped by a last moment phone call from the national transplant coordination center after they lost contact with the flight.

While organ collection processes begin, a bunch of people receive their most awaited telephone call ever.

"Linda/John/Betty/Steve ...your lung/heart/kidney/liver ... is ready. Let's get ready for operation within the next hour."

Someone in California gets a much needed lung, the heart goes to Connecticut to renew a young girl's life, and the liver emergently flies to Nebraska to save another life.

Each day, in the United States, about 74 people receive organ transplants. However, 18 people die each day waiting for transplants that can't take place because of the shortage of donated organs.

Between January to March of 2006, a total of 5207 organs were donated from deceased donors and 1,705 organs were donated by living

