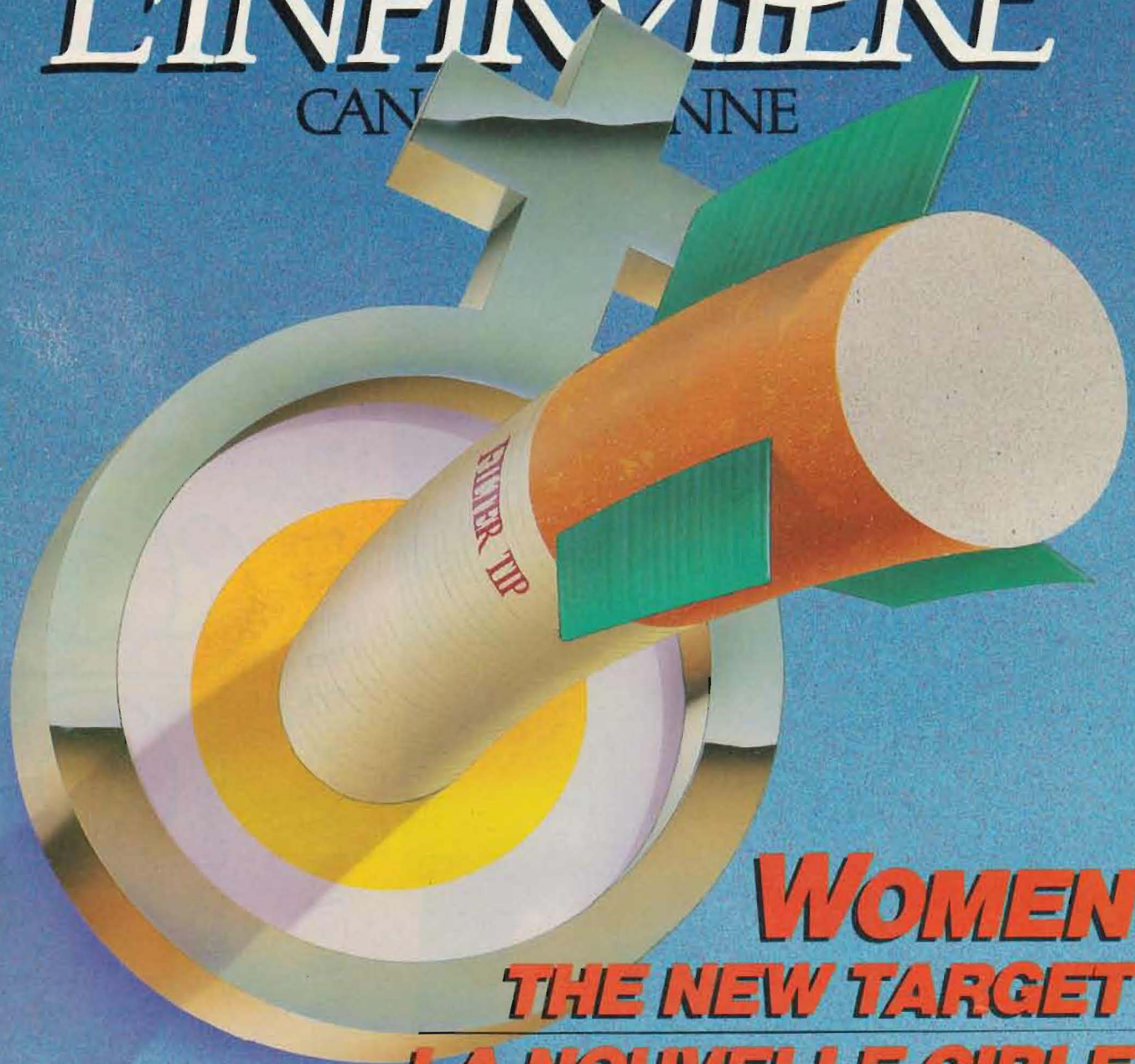


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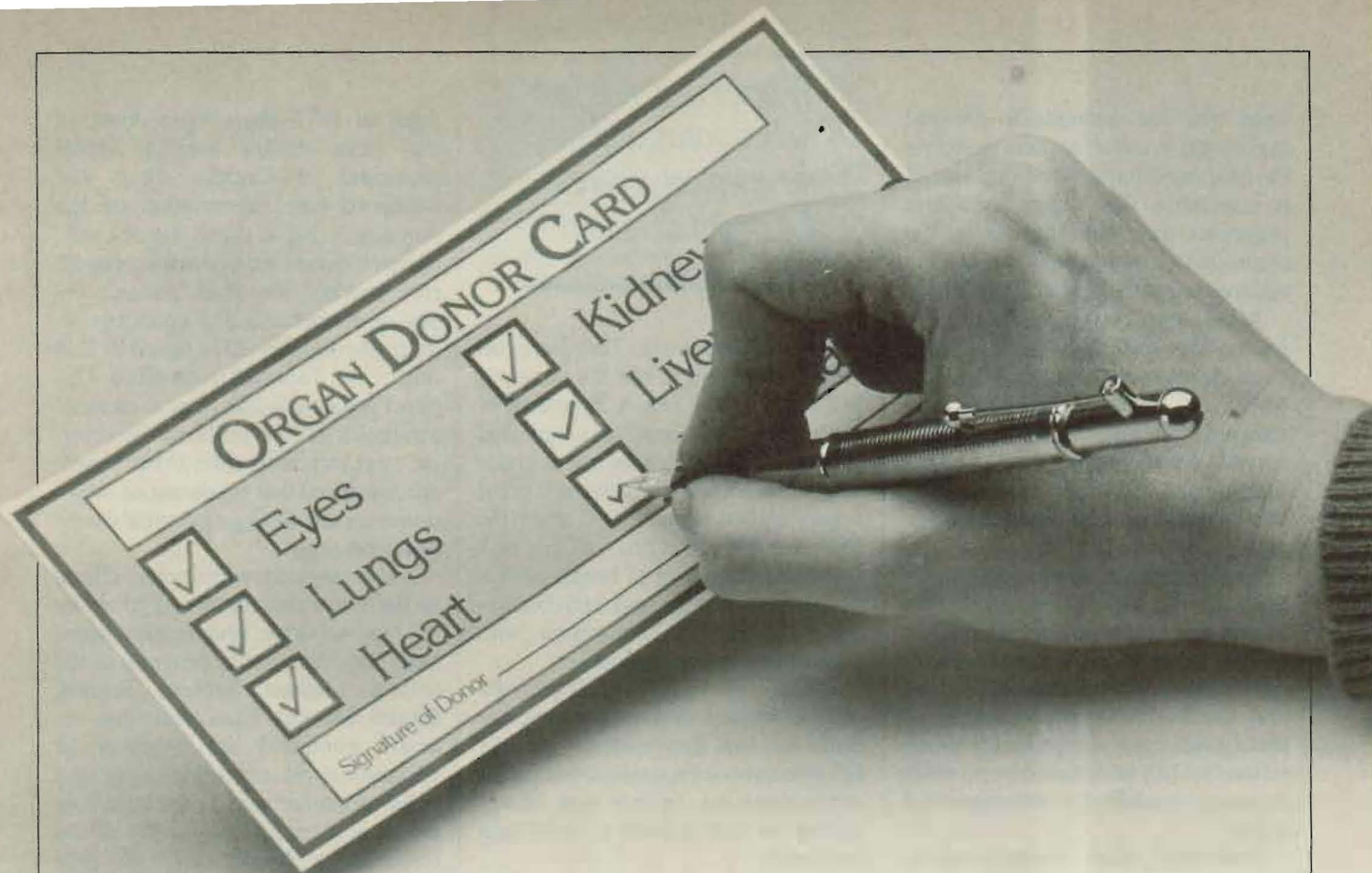
Caring for the brain dead and their families/Le lupus érythémateux

A smoking cessation program that works/Mesure des débits/Women as targets

THE CANADIAN
NURSE
L'INFIRMIÈRE
CANADIANNE



WOMEN
THE NEW TARGET
LA NOUVELLE CIBLE



THE ROLE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN **ORGAN DONATION**

In June of 1985 the Registered Nurses' Association of Nova Scotia (RNANS) adopted two resolutions recognizing the importance of organ donation for transplantation and the nurse's role in these processes. Following this, a resolution was submitted by the RNANS to the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) and subsequently passed at the 1986 biennial meeting. The resolution requested that CNA develop a statement on the role of nurses in organ and tissue donation, retrieval and transplantation and that the association should promote the

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*If organ procurement
programs are to succeed
they need our support.
Before giving it, we require
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BY PATRICIA J. HOULIHAN, RN, MSc

education of nurses regarding their role. Since that time, CNA has empowered its Committee on Health Issues to produce a position statement on organ donation and transplantation.

All of these events indicate that

Canadian nurses are united with other health professionals in the belief that organ donation is a standard of good medical practice.

Organ transplantation is neither new nor experimental. As a result of major medical, surgical and pharmacological advances during the last decade, the major stumbling block to an increase in organ transplantation services throughout Canada and the rest of North America, is a lack of donor organs.

Organ transplantation is unlike any other health care service available to Canadians. The raw materials needed to treat those patients with end-stage organ failure can neither be purchased nor manufactured. These patients

must wait for someone to die and make a gift in order for them to receive the treatment that they require. Thus it is imperative that organ transplant programs have the support of the community at large, and the nursing and medical communities in particular.

More than 80,000 kidneys, 1500 hearts and 1200 livers have already been transplanted throughout the world, and thousands of people have received the gift of sight through corneal transplants. These numbers only tell part of the story as bone, skin, pancreas and lung transplants continue to increase in number.

Kidneys are the most widely transplanted solid organ. Over 7000 renal transplants are carried out annually in North America.¹ According to Canadian transplant physicians Paul Keown and Calvin Stiller, the recipients of these grafts enjoy a degree of rehabilitation that can be equalled by no other treatment modality for end-stage renal failure.

Following renal transplantation, patients experience a 95 percent survival rate with an almost 80 percent one-year graft survival.² Success rates for other organs such as hearts and livers also continue to improve. Despite annual increases in the total number of transplants, there remain close to 1200 Canadians who continue to wait for organs, primarily kidneys.³

Nurses have a variety of roles to play in the organ donation/transplantation process, including: identification of potential donors; obtaining consent for donation; emotional support of donor families; physiological care of the cadaveric organ donor; and dissemination of information on organ donation to the general public.

One role often overlooked is the nurse's unique ability to become an organ donor advocate. Nurses in a variety of settings, given the appropriate education, could provide the general public with a wealth of information on organ donation. There is little doubt, however, that health professionals need to be educated on the topic of organ donation. This education will lead them to the conviction that organ donation is a standard of good medical and nursing practice, and that it can no longer be overlooked.

Nurses may not feel fully informed about the medical criteria for organ donation

In 1984, the Ontario Task Force on Organ Donation in the 80s surveyed 118 hospitals⁴, in which 75 percent of the health professionals surveyed cited lack of clear guidelines as a major impediment to their involvement in the organ donation process. One of the final recommendations of the task force was education of health professionals both through basic and continuing education in conjunction with organ procurement agencies.

Individuals have postulated why nurses overlook donors: nurses sometimes feel that they may not be fully informed about the medical criteria for organ donation; or they may be unwilling or not trained to approach families.⁵

It seems clear that there is a need for all nurses, regardless of their place of employment, to be educated about the process of organ donation.

Although professional associations such as the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Nurses Association have indicated their commitment to the concept of education for organ donation, programs to implement recommendations have yet to be developed. The Canadian Medical Association came a step closer to fulfilling its commitment in

April of 1987 when organ donation kits were mailed out to 54,000 physicians in Canada. These kits contained basic information on the donation process, organ donor cards, a letter requesting that doctors become role models for their patients by signing donor cards, and a prescription for organ donation to be signed by that doctor and displayed in his office. This effort has gone a long way to increase awareness of the problem; however, the next step is to ensure that people are convinced that becoming an organ donor, or identifying a potential donor is a good thing.

Most ongoing educational efforts on the donor process are carried out by the regional organ procurement agencies. The organ donor program of the federal Medical Services Branch, Health Services Directorate has recently published an inventory of educational resources for organ and tissue donation and transplantation, which is a comprehensive list of the resources available from all procurement agencies across Canada.⁶

What is clear now is that there is a commitment among health professionals, at least at a national level, to the concept of organ and tissue donation. The associations are currently in the process of mobilizing their beliefs into positive action so that individual health professionals can voice their commitment and become advocates for patients whose lives rely on their support. □

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Abrégé

Le rôle des professionnels de la santé dans les dons d'organes. Le principal obstacle à l'accroissement des services de transplantation d'organes au Canada et dans le reste de l'Amérique du Nord est le manque d'organes. Si l'on veut toutefois que les programmes d'obtention d'organes réussissent, il leur faut l'appui de la collectivité, en particulier, des professionnels de la santé. L'éducation en matière du processus de don d'organes peut aider à former cet appui.