It’s the Season of Service in New Jersey
By Mary E. O’Dowd, MPH, Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services

The holidays are upon us and it is the time of the year when we reflect on what we have accomplished, recognize how fortunate many of us are to share in the love of family and friends and create goals for the upcoming year. It’s also the time to reach out to others who may be less fortunate. In the spirit of giving, I encourage everyone to open their hearts and support causes that help those in need. This holiday season, I urge everyone to think about donating blood and registering to be an organ donor.

As part of the Christie Administration’s Season of Service, on December 13th, I visited the NJ Sharing Network and met with staff, organ recipients and donor families to promote organ and tissue donation. The importance of registering and becoming a donor cannot be overstated. Registering as an organ donor is simple, residents can sign-up when they renew their license or visit www.donatelifenj.org. By becoming an organ and tissue donor you can save up to 8 lives and restore health to over 50 people. Currently, more than 4,700 New Jersey residents are waiting to receive life-saving organ transplants; and only 32 percent of New Jersey residents are registered as organ donors.

New Jersey has six hospitals that perform organ transplants: Saint Barnabas Medical Center in Livingston, Newark Beth Israel Medical Center in Newark, Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center in Camden, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick, Hackensack University Medical Center in Hackensack and University Hospital in Newark.

The importance and impact of the gift of donation is most meaningfully shared through the stories of donor families and recipients. During my visit, I met with several individuals whose lives were saved by organ donation. I also had an opportunity to meet with donor families who spoke about how the spirit of their loved ones lives on through donation. Maria Perez talked about her decision to donate her son Roberto’s organs when he passed and how he gave the gift of life to five individuals.

I encourage everyone to open their hearts and support causes that help those in need and I ask everyone to think about donating blood and registering to be an organ donor as part of their holiday donations.

On December 13, Commissioner O’Dowd visited the NJ Sharing Network to meet with staff, organ recipients and donor families to promote organ and tissue donation. During the visit, the Commissioner met Maria Perez (second from the left), whose son Roberto’s portrait will be part of the Donate Life float in the upcoming Rose Parade.
It’s Not too Late to Get a Flu Shot!

Before you head to the mall to purchase that last minute holiday gift or begin to prepare for the New Year’s celebration, make sure you take time to get a flu shot before the peak of the flu season arrives in January or February.

Everyone six months of age or older should get a flu shot this winter. Flu shots are especially important for certain groups of individuals who are at higher risk for serious complications. Those groups are: Pregnant women, children under the age of five, people 50 years of age and older, people with certain chronic medical conditions such as asthma, heart disease, cancer, diabetes and HIV, people who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, and health care workers.

To find a nearby flu clinic, please visit the “Find a Flu Shot” locator on the Department’s website.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates between five and 20 percent of individuals get the flu each year. In New Jersey that means between 420,000 and 1.7 million people will get the flu this year. Nationally, more than 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 people die due to flu complications each year.

Taking common sense measures will help protect against the flu virus. Be sure to wash your hands, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, avoid close contact with sick people and stay home from work or school if you are sick.

The symptoms of flu include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headaches and fatigue. Most people recover from the flu within two weeks, but some people may develop serious complications such as pneumonia, which can be life-threatening. Individuals with concerns about their symptoms should consult their health care provider.

Those who do get the flu should stay home for at least 24 hours after a fever is gone and stay home from work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings.

Vaccines are safe and effective. But some people should not get a flu shot. Children younger than six months of age are too young to get vaccinated and anyone who has ever had a severe allergic reaction to the flu vaccine also should not get a flu shot. People with known severe allergic reactions to eggs should consult with a doctor with expertise in the management of allergic conditions before receiving a flu vaccine.

For general flu information and resources, please visit the DHSS website at http://nj.gov/health/flu/generalinfo.shtml.
Heart Failure Treatment and Transplant Program
Newark Beth Israel Medical Center

The heart transplant program at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center (NBIMC) is the oldest and most experienced in the state. In 2011, it was ranked as the nation’s fifth largest program by volume and has achieved excellent patient outcomes over two decades. Last year, it was one of only two programs in the country to exceed expected three-year survival rates.

The program’s outstanding reputation has made it a principal site for groundbreaking research. New Jersey residents have access to investigational devices, new surgical techniques, as well as pharmaceutical and research protocols. Patients benefit from the latest generation of ventricular assist devices (VADs) that take over the pumping action of a diseased heart and serve as a bridge to transplant or destination therapy. Virtually all FDA-approved and investigational VADs are available at NBIMC.

As one of the nation’s most progressive programs, NBIMC continues to increase access to heart transplants and improve the quality of life for transplant recipients. Its nationally renowned multidisciplinary team is on the frontier of heart failure treatment. Most recently, the program has been selected to participate in prestigious stem cell research as well as clinical trials in innovative new methods for preserving organs for transplant.

Article submitted by: Barnabas Health

Renal and Pancreas Transplant Division of Barnabas Health

Technical excellence, surgical innovation and a genuine interest and concern for people are distinguishing characteristics that describe the staff at the Renal and Pancreas Transplant Division of Barnabas Health. Add clinical research and patient advocacy to the picture and you can begin to see why together Saint Barnabas and Newark Beth Israel Medical Centers form one of the largest kidney transplant programs among 240 in the United States. In 2010, the Division achieved record-breaking volumes - performing 298 transplants, including 135 living donor transplants.

For more than 40 years, Barnabas Health has remained a leader in the field and pioneered a series of medical firsts in New Jersey, among them, the first living donor kidney transplant program, pediatric nephrology and transplantation program, paired kidney exchange and program for incompatible transplantation as well as the world’s first robotic-assisted living donor kidney transplant in 2008.

Barnabas Health offers New Jersey’s only Living Donor Institute, begun in 2006, to promote living donation as the best transplant option for patients with chronic kidney disease. Living Donation options include: Living- and emotionally related (spouse, co-worker or friend) kidney transplantation, paired exchange program, altruistic living donation, and the program for incompatible transplantation.

To learn more, please visit www.transplantkidney.org.

Article submitted by: Barnabas Health
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Maria and her husband Carlos will travel to the Rose Parade in Pasadena next month to see the Donate Life float, which will feature Roberto’s portrait.

Donating blood is equally important. Nine out of 10 people will need blood at some time in their lives due to illness or to treat an injury, and donating blood can save up to three lives. Almost anyone can give blood as long as you are at least 17 years old, in good health and weigh at least 110 pounds. Sixteen-year-olds can donate with parental permission. The holidays are a time when blood supplies in New Jersey are at critically low levels. Last December, during the Christmas blizzard blood supplies ran dangerously low as vacation schedules and the weather hampered the ability for people to donate. Next month is National Blood Donor Month and there will be plenty of opportunities available for residents to donate. To find a blood donation center closest to you visit [www.state.nj.us/health/njsave3lives/centers.shtml](http://www.state.nj.us/health/njsave3lives/centers.shtml).

In this season of giving, please take time to donate to those in need—the gift of life is truly the greatest gift of all. I wish for everyone to have a happy and safe holiday, a joyful New Year.

On December 22, Commissioner O’Dowd visited the Morris Hall Nursing Home in Lawrenceville to help residents create holiday cards and bracelets for their friends and families. Commissioner O’Dowd is pictured with Ms. Margaret Sine, a 91 year-old resident.
Tips for Conducting a Workplace Blood Drive

Organizing and planning a workplace blood drive is a straightforward process that addresses a serious public health need through employee participation and community involvement. DHSS is encouraging businesses throughout the state to increase New Jersey’s blood supply in 2012 by conducting more workplace blood drives.

January is National Blood Donor Month, a time to plan a blood drive campaign for the entire year. Through workplace blood drives, employers can address the three reasons most people give for not donating blood: donating is inconvenient, no one ever asked them to donate and they were unaware of the need. Workplace blood drives enable employees to donate without leaving the office. Employers can appeal to workers to donate and explain the need for blood donation.

Here are guidelines for employers that can help ensure successful blood drives are well-received by employees.

Plan for the year. Consider scheduling more than one blood drive and arrange dates with the blood center nearest your location. For a complete
Workplace Blood Drive, continued from page 5

list and contact information on blood centers in New Jersey visit www.njsave3lives.com. Blood center representatives can help make the arrangements. Organizing the first blood drive takes about 12 weeks and eight weeks for subsequent blood drives. This ensures time to mobilize a team, alert employees, and conduct an information campaign to promote blood donation.

Make a drive-day schedule with specific times for donors to sign up to donate. Appointments help the drive move smoothly.

Form a team by appointing a blood drive champion to organize a committee of enthusiastic volunteers to be Blood Drive Captains. They will help to plan the blood drive and promote employee participation.

Gather testimonials from employees who have benefited from receiving blood. People are motivated to give blood when they hear about a colleague who has been helped by blood donation.

Promote the drive. Posters, internal e-mails, paycheck inserts and “save the date” notices that can be posted onto electronic calendars remind employees about the date and time.

Ask the blood drive captains to e-mail or call their assigned employees the day before the drive to remind them of the appointment.

Set goals and provide incentives for donating. During the blood drive, update employees on progress toward the goal and post the results at the end of the drive.

The day of the drive, ask the captains to take photographs of employees donating blood and post them on the company website.

Finally, managers can e-mail their employees thanking them for organizing the drive and for making a donation that can potentially save lives. A single unit of blood donated in the course of an otherwise routine work day can save up to three lives.

Legislative Update: Governor Signs End of Life Care Bill

Governor Christie signed legislation on 12/21/11 that will enable patients to indicate their preferences regarding life-sustaining treatment. The law calls for the creation of a standardized Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST) form that is signed by a patient’s attending physician or advanced practice nurse and provides instructions for health care personnel to follow for a range of life-prolonging interventions. This form becomes part of a patient’s medical records, following the patient from one healthcare setting to another, including hospital, home, nursing home, or hospice.

Commissioner O’Dowd, as one of her key priorities, is working with the provider community to improve palliative and end-of-life care by empowering patients and their families. The POLST form will be an important tool in achieving that goal.
Community Outreach/Events

December 1 – Commissioner O’Dowd participated in the “Teaming Up to Shape Our Region: A Pathway to Baby-Friendly Conference” to highlight New Jersey’s baby-friendly hospital initiative supported by a grant from the Department.

December 2 – The Department recognized World AIDS Day (December 1) at an education and remembrance event at the Trinity Cathedral in Trenton. Co-sponsors included the NJ Women and AIDS Network, Henry J. Austin FQHC, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, City of Trenton, Trinity Cathedral, Mercer Intervention Services and Hyacinth Foundation.

December 2 – Commissioner O’Dowd delivered remarks focused on the Department’s public health initiatives at the New Jersey Society of Public Health Educator’s Conference.

December 8 – Dr. Arturo Brito, Deputy Commissioner of Public Health Services, visited the Eric B. Chandler Health Center in New Brunswick to encourage parents and children to get flu shots.

NJHOA: Celebrating 100 Years of Public Health

The New Jersey Health Officer’s Association (NJHOA) celebrated 100 years of providing public health services to the residents of New Jersey during a gala attended by more than 150 guests at the Newark Museum on Dec. 2.

Health and Senior Services Commissioner Mary O’Dowd, Deputy Commissioner Dr. Arturo Brito and Natalie Pawlenko, director of the Office of Local Health; joined Newark Mayor Cory Booker, UMDNJ School of Public Health Dean George Rhoads, NJHOA President Peter Correale and NJ Boards of Health Association President John Saccenti at the centennial celebration.

The NJHOA was formed to advance knowledge of public health and sanitation, and has a long history of successful advocacy for public health advances. Its mission is to prevent infectious and chronic diseases, promote healthy lifestyle choices and protect the health of New Jersey’s residents and the environment.

A retrospective of the public health achievements of the past 100 years was presented by Dr. Peter Wenger of UMDNJ.

Wenger’s presentation covered the influenza epidemic of 1918 and 1976, the polio epidemic in the 1940s, the isolation of thousands of TB patients in places like Sanatorium in Glen Gardner, the first reported case of HIV in a child made in 1981 by Dr. James Oleske from the UMDNJ NJ Medical School, the Smoke-Free Air Act of 2006 and environmental issues from chemical contaminations to hurricanes and floods.

John Saccenti, President of the New Jersey Local Boards of Health Association; Corey Booker, Mayor of Newark; Commissioner Mary E. O’Dowd and Dr. Arturo Brito, Deputy Commissioner of Public Health Services attend the 100 year anniversary of the New Jersey Hospital Association.
Congratulations to the Department of Health and Senior Services for winning two national awards from the National Public Health Information Coalition on December 15.

The Health of the Newest New Jerseyans; A Resource Guide won gold in the annual or major report category. Congratulations to authors Colette Lamothe-Galette, Loretta Kelly and Kenneth O’Dowd from the DHSS Office of Policy and Strategic Planning for their work in creating the report. View the report

The second was a silver award for an op-ed on New Jersey’s Medicinal Marijuana Program.

Congratulations to John Calabria, Alison Gibson, Barbara Goldman, and Gene Brenyz, in the Division of Health Facilities Evaluation and Licensing for their efforts developing a Universal Transfer Form (UTF) that is improving patient safety in New Jersey. The form that went into effect on October 30 is being used by 1,900 licensed health care facilities and includes critical information on a patient’s medical history including vital signs, diagnosis, medications, allergies and other medical conditions the patient may be experiencing.

Congratulations to Louise Rush and Nanine Ponella in the DHSS Division of Senior Benefits & Utilization Management for their work in increasing seniors’ awareness of the state’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (NJ SNAP). By sharing PAAD enrollment files with the Department of Human Services and working with New Jersey counties to make the NJ SNAP application process simpler, 16,000 low-income seniors who were unaware they were eligible for the NJ SNAP program received needed food assistance. Their work not only helped seniors in need, it is an example of how DHSS is working with our sister agencies and other levels of government to work smarter and more efficiently.
The New Jersey Epilepsy Task Force

By Chairwoman Shelby Myers

One in 10 people will have an epileptic seizure during their lifetime. One in 100 will be diagnosed with epilepsy, the nation’s most common brain disorder, affecting 2.7 million people. In New Jersey, that translates to about 90,000 people—including 30,000 children.

Epilepsy is more common than Cerebral Palsy, Multiple Sclerosis and Parkinson’s disease combined. It is prevalent among individuals with other disabilities such as autism (25.5%), mental retardation (25.5%), Cerebral Palsy (13%) and Down’s syndrome (13.6%). There also is a strong connection between epilepsy and depression.

One of the thousands of people affected in our state is my son, Clayton. He was diagnosed with the disorder when he was six years old while fighting a simple virus. Clay spent five months at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, where he had numerous operations, was given a host of medications, was on a ventilator, then a trach and a feeding tube. He came home dependent on us for everything. Today, at age 13, Clay cannot walk, talk, eat, or follow directions. On a bad day, he can have up to 200 seizures. On good days, he has retained the ability to play catch, dance in his wheelchair when he hears music, and give a wide grin that melts my heart.

Although there is no cure for this disorder, which affects Clay and so many others, it can usually be successfully treated.

Recognizing the vital public health interest in better understanding the illness, Governor Chris Christie signed legislation establishing the New Jersey Epilepsy Task Force to better educate the public and health care professionals about epilepsy. The task force is also charged with making recommendations to improve screening, diagnosis, and treatment of epilepsy and its complications.

As chairwoman of the task force and the mother of a child with epilepsy, I am committed to expanding awareness and de-stigmatizing this condition. The task force held their first organization meeting last month, where the agenda was developed for the upcoming year. Subcommittees were created to develop recommendations for educating the public and health care professionals and to develop recommendations that address psychosocial issues, such as depression, stigmatization, and discrimination. This spring the task force plans to hold public hearings in the northern, central and southern parts of the state to hear from the epilepsy community. The hearings are designed to help the task force assess the needs of people with epilepsy and their families in order to develop meaningful recommendations.

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Interactive Student Exhibit on Healthy Lifestyles Opens at the Newark Museum: 
Generation Fit: Steps to a Healthier Lifestyle

A new interactive exhibit designed to draw attention to the childhood obesity epidemic opened recently at the Newark Museum. *Generation Fit: Steps to a Healthier Lifestyle* is designed to deliver education about nutrition and physical exercise in an engaging, unique and fun learning environment.

Childhood obesity affects more than 12.5 million children and teens in the U.S., roughly 17 percent of that population. It’s a disturbing statistic especially when you consider that the rate has roughly tripled since 1960 when only 5 percent of children and teens were obese.

Like the rest of the nation, New Jersey also faces a significant public health challenge in reducing childhood obesity rates. Nearly 31 percent of children ages 10-17 are overweight or obese, 10 percent of New Jersey high school students are obese, and New Jersey has the highest obesity rates in the nation among low-income children, ages 2-5. In fact, unless the health of young people is improved, they could be the first generation in U.S. history to live shorter and less healthy lives than their parents.

Newark Museum Director Mary Sue Price said the exhibit “represents a commitment by the Museum to join this all-important national effort to educate our youngsters about the dangers inherent in obesity.”

*Generation Fit* is not your typical exhibit. Visitors begin by receiving pedometers that link the steps they take to calories burned as they walk through the museum.

Among the highlights:

- **Calorie Crank** demonstrates how much energy is needed to burn calories after eating. By turning the crank and watching a ticker participants track how much energy is required to burn off calories from various foods.

- **My Plate** teaches about proper nutrition and food portions by allowing people to choose from an array of foods with different nutritional values. Once the food choices are made, an interactive display provides feedback on whether the meal is healthy. It also shows how small plates make a meal look larger and how a colored plate can disguise the amount of sauce or gravy you place on your food.

- **Dollars & Scents** demonstrates how aroma and flavor impact food purchases. Empty-calorie junk foods are made to smell like family favorites such as cinnamon bun, hamburger, fries, pizza and popcorn. This display explores how foods are engineered to make you eat more. Part of this exhibit allows you to pick up fat to experience how much it weighs and impacts your body.

- **Body Scan** compares health and unhealthy human bodies in order to discover diseases caused by poor diet and lack of exercise such as heart disease and osteoarthritis.
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two neurologists; the executive director of the Epilepsy Foundation of New Jersey; two representatives of agencies that provide services to people with epilepsy in this state; two individuals who have epilepsy; a parent with a child who has epilepsy; a member of the public with expertise in issues related to the work of the task force; and a pharmacist.

Through the work of the Task Force we can eliminate the presumptions and misinformation surrounding epilepsy – for Clay and everyone else who may be living with this condition and the negative bias that accompanies it.

The Epilepsy Task Force was established by statute from A-2913/S-1928. It has 13 members: the Commissioners of Human Services and Health and Senior Services, or their designees, and 11 public members. Full membership includes: Neurologist Dr. Marcelo E. Lancman; Pediatric Neurologist Dr. Roopal M. Karia; Agency Representatives: Ann Marie Bezuyen, Dr. Eric B. Gellar; Consultant Pharmacist, Dr. Harry A. Thibodeau, R.Ph., CCP, FASCP; Epilepsy Foundation of New Jersey, Eric M. Joice; Public Members: self advocate, Ann Carletta; self advocate, Nicole J. Hartmann; Parent, Shelby A. Myers.

Shelby Myers is an advocate for Epilepsy research and awareness. She can be reached at shelbyamyers@aol.com. She has established a Foundation and website in honor of her son Clayton. It can be found at www.claytonshope.org.

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• **Know Your BMI** takes visitors to a “nutritionist’s office” to see an interactive video that teaches how to calculate Body Mass Index (BMI). Visitors receive special vests to demonstrate what it is like to carry extra weight.

The museum is offering educational and fitness workshops to complement Generation Fit including Zumba fitness, dance, yoga and fitness training, healthy cooking demonstrations, gardening and outdoor recreation and other professional development workshops.

The exhibit received major support from the Health Care Foundation of New Jersey, Chase and other nonprofit and for profit organizations.

For more on Generation Fit and the Newark Museum please visit: www.newarkmuseum.org/genfit.html