

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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MISS TEXAS NO STRANGER TO TISSUE TRANSPLANTS

DALLAS — August 28, 1995 — When this year's Miss Texas, Carly Jarmon of Mesquite, stands up to advocate organ and tissue donation during the Miss America pageant in September, she'll be speaking from experience.

Jarmon, who suffers from a potentially fatal blood disorder called idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP), is no stranger to blood transfusions. "Many people may not realize that transfusions are a tissue transplant, but blood is considered a body tissue," said Linda Humphries, education coordinator for the Transplant Services Center at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

ITP affects Jarmon's platelet production and her blood's clotting ability. She's been in remission for two and a half years now, but ITP is a condition that recurs. When it does, treatments include transfusions and large doses of steroids. Chemotherapy is an option for future treatment. Ultimately she may need to have her spleen removed.

For more than a year, the new Miss Texas has been speaking about transplantation to science classes in nearly every elementary school in Oak Cliff, the Dallas community she represented in the state pageant.

She tries to help children understand what this kind of gift means to patients waiting for donor organs and tissues. She explains that patients needing corneas may be older persons like their own grandparents. Small children may need bone marrow to survive, or a high-school football hero may need bone chips for his injured knee.

Jarmon uses dolls to help carry her message to children. One is a child-sized, stuffed Debbie Donor. The other is a wooden puzzle doll handcrafted by area heart-recipient Leroy Starnes. Both dolls have removable vital organs and skin transplant patches. Whether she goes as Miss Texas or as Miss America, Jarmon already has more than 200 school appearances planned for next year. She credits her grandparents, longtime transplant-donation

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advocates, with teaching her the importance of being a donor. With their encouragement and her mother's permission, Miss Texas, now 19, signed her first donor card when she was just 12.

When Ellen Heck, director of transplant services at UT Southwestern, and Humphries heard about Jarmon's interest, they invited her to visit their tissue bank.

Heck told her that most people think of giving one or two organs when they consider donation. "Actually, seven patients can receive life-giving transplants from a single donor's heart, liver, pancreas, two lungs and two kidneys," she said. "The same donor also can help as many as 30 or more patients needing tissues. Even when vital organs can't be used for transplant, donating tissue can help others."

Some of these tissues include sclera (the white of the eye, used in plastic and oral surgeries), skin, bone, blood vessels, heart valves and connective tissue. Also needed are tissue for eye surgeries and bones for spinal fusions, knee constructions, major joint replacements, facial reconstruction, tumor replacement, and repair of certain kinds of fractures and other traumatic injuries.

"Cornea transplants alone benefited 44,000 U.S. citizens last year, from babies to great-grandmothers," Heck said.

A pioneer in tissue research and banking, Heck is an active advocate of donor education. Several years ago she established an annual program of thanksgiving, unique to Dallas, which is usually held in late November and includes transplant recipients, donor-family members and medical personnel. She also developed a model workshop on donations for chaplains and health personnel interested in volunteering to approach families in the hospital and organized a nurses' advisory board.

Heck is delighted that Miss Texas chose organ and tissue donation as her pageant platform. "Through her advocacy, Carly will reach millions of people who might never have really heard the message before," she said.

Miss Texas knows she can't be a blood or bone-marrow donor herself because of her ITP. "But I can donate just about anything else — like my skin," the beauty pageant winner said with a wink and a grin.

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