



# Winning the Waiting Game?

## Teacher information

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### Summary:

Students explore issues surrounding a website (MatchingDonors.com) that matches people who need a kidney transplant with people who are willing to donate one of their kidneys.

### Core concepts:

- Science provides knowledge, but values are also essential to making effective and ethical decisions about the application of scientific knowledge.
- Inquiry involves asking questions and locating, interpreting, and processing information from a variety of sources.
- Inquiry involves making judgments about the reliability of the source and relevance of the information.
- Societies must decide on proposals which involve the introduction of new technologies. Individuals need to make decisions which will assess risks, costs, benefits, and trade-offs.

### Class time required:

One 40-minute class periods + homework (The amount of class time required depends on time allocated for exploring the websites.)

### Teacher preparation:

- Explore the MatchingDonors.com website at <http://matchingdonors.com> and the UNOS (United Organ Sharing Network) website at <http://unos.org/> Pay particularly close attention to the articles, resources, patient home, and potential donor home.
- Arrange for computer access for students to work individually or in teams of 2-3 students.
- Each student will need 1 copy of *Winning the Waiting Game*

### During Class:

1. Distribute 1 copy of *Winning the Waiting Game* to each student.
2. Read *The Case* and the article *Winning the Waiting Game—MatchingDonors.com* aloud to the entire class

3. Ask students to work individually or in small groups to complete the *Winning the Waiting Game* activity.
  4. Optional: Allow class time for students to share their answers to the questions.
  5. Optional: Encourage students to read and share information from other articles about the MatchingDonors.com website.
- <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2005/05.19/09-organ.html> Harvard Gazette, *HMS examines ethics of Internet organ donation*
  - <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/10/27/health/main651771.shtml> CBS News, *Web-Kidney Transplant Underway*
  - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/22/AR2005092201901.html> Washington Post, *Search for Transplant Organs Becomes a Web Free-for-All*
  - <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/492097> Medscape Medical News, *Brokering Organ Transplants on the Internet Raises Ethical Issues.*
  - <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/22/health/22essa.html> New York Times, *An Internet Lifeline, In Search of a Kidney.*
  - [http://www.aarpsegundajuventud.org/english/health/2006-AS/06AS\\_donation.html](http://www.aarpsegundajuventud.org/english/health/2006-AS/06AS_donation.html) AARP Bulletin, *Winning the Waiting Game* (also available in Spanish)
  - [http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2004-10-25-organ-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2004-10-25-organ-usat_x.htm) USA Today Online, *organ match raises ethical concerns*
  - [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/03/weekinreview/03lewin.html?\\_r=3&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/03/weekinreview/03lewin.html?_r=3&pagewanted=print) New York Times, *A Television Audition for a Part in and of Life*
  - <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/jul/30/kindness-of-strangers/> Washington Times, *The Kindness of Strangers*

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# Winning the Waiting Game? *Teacher Answer Key*

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## The Case:

Your patient had a kidney transplant 3 years ago. Her body has rejected the transplanted kidney. She's back on dialysis and on the waiting list for a cadaver kidney. She knows it may be years before a cadaver kidney (a kidney from someone who died) becomes available. She also knows that cadaver kidneys are more likely to be rejected than kidneys from living donors.

One of her friends at the dialysis center encouraged your patient to register at <http://matchingdonors.com> to see if she can find a stranger who would be willing to donate a kidney to her. She is very excited about this new way of finding a kidney donor, but she is also a bit skeptical. She wants to know whether she should list herself on this site.

1. Read the article below titled *Winning the Waiting Game - MatchingDonors.com*.

### **Winning the Waiting Game - MatchingDonors.com**

While it's illegal to auction off your kidney on eBay, you can sign on to **MatchingDonors.com** and give your kidney away for free. If the idea of donating a vital organ doesn't sound like an appealing proposition, try talking to one of 2,000 registered donors who are considering becoming living kidney donors.

Up until recently, the majority of organ transplants were handled by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), an organization that distributes organs according to medical urgency, time on the waiting list, and geographical availability. UNOS provides a national distribution system for donated organs by linking local transplant centers. Each time a donor organ becomes available, transplant centers notify UNOS. The UNOS computer generates a list of candidates based on factors that include genetic similarity, organ size, medical urgency, proximity of the donor to potential recipients, and time on the waiting list.

But now there is a commercial website, MatchingDonors.com, designed to match patients who need transplanted organs with people who are willing to donate organs. What's different about MatchingDonors.com (and what makes it so controversial) are two things:

The first is the ability it gives patients to jump ahead in the long waiting line by paying the site's membership fees, which start at \$295 for 30 days. This could put those with less financial resources at a considerable disadvantage. When it means the difference between life and death, the opportunity to "jump ahead in the waiting line" is sure to have major implications.

Second is the fact that UNOS, the organization that traditionally arranges for the transfer of the organ between the donor and the recipient, is completely cut out of the picture under this system.

There is no longer an unbiased third-party to monitor factors such as donor suitability, compliance with existing laws, fair distribution of organs, and long-term effects on the donor and the recipient.

Some people have commented that MatchingDonors.com makes it easier for potential donors to understand the process of kidney donation. Comparing the website of UNOS (<http://www.unos.org/>) with that of MatchingDonors.com (<http://matchingdonors.com/>) is interesting, particularly in terms of new donor appeal. UNOS offers little to entice prospective organ donors other than occasional sidebar quotes from organ recipients. MatchingDonors.com contains detailed profiles of individuals in need of help, complete with photos and personal stories. Hearing these compelling stories about patients and their families may encourage more prospective donors.

Modified from: <http://www.searchviews.com/index.php/archives/2005/05/life-or-death-now-available-online-matchingdonorscom.php>

2. Explore the website <http://MatchingDonors.com>. Look at the articles, resources, and patient profiles.
3. Explore the UNOS website (<http://www.unos.org/>). Look at the articles, resources, patient profiles.
4. List 2 ways that the MatchingDonors.com website and UNOS website are different.

***Student answers will vary but may include:***

***The MatchingDonors website allows donors to select who will get their kidney.***

***The UNOS website will select a recipient based on donor suitability, compliance with existing laws, fair distribution of organs, and long-term effects.***

***The MatchingDonors website provides compelling stories that encourage donors.***

***The UNOS website does not provide this personal approach.***

5. If you needed a kidney transplant, would you list yourself on the MatchingDonor.com website? Why or why not?

***Student answers will vary. Encourage students to share and discuss the reasons behind their answer.***

6. If you wanted to donate a kidney to someone, would you list yourself on the MatchingDonor.com website? Why or why not?

***Student answers will vary. Encourage students to share and discuss the reasons behind their answer.***

7. Use the patient search feature on <http://matchingdonors.com/> to search for patients seeking a kidney donor. Read at least 5 patient profiles.

8. If you wanted to donate a kidney, make a list of characteristics that you would look for in the person who would receive your kidney.

***Student answers will vary. Encourage students to share and discuss the characteristics that would influence their selecting a donor.***

9. If you were a patient seeking a donor, what kinds of information would you include in your patient profile to make donors more likely to donate a kidney to you?

***Student answers will vary. Encourage students to share and discuss their ideas for what they would include in a patient profile.***

10. Write a simulated patient profile that demonstrates how you would encourage donors to select you as a kidney recipient. Hint: Your answers for questions 8 and 9 may give you ideas for what to include in your patient profile.

***Student answers will vary. Encourage students to share and discuss their ideas for what they would include in a patient profile.***