

Facebook moves to help organ donations

May 1 2012, by Rob Lever

Facebook on Tuesday unveiled an initiative to use the vast social network to help connect organ donors with people who need life-saving transplants.

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg announced the initiative and became one of the first Facebook users to sign up to donate on the social network.

Members of Facebook in the United States and Britain can now indicate that they are organ donors on their timelines, and if they are not donors, they can find links to official organ donation registries and instantly enroll.

"Facebook is really about communicating and telling stories," Zuckerberg told ABC News.

"We think that people can really help spread awareness of organ donation and that they want to participate in this to their friends. And that can be a big part of helping solve the crisis that's out there."

Zuckerberg said he was motivated to launch the program by conversations with his girlfriend, who is a medical student, and his friendship with Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, whose life was extended by a liver transplant.

"We want to make it simple," said Zuckerberg. "You just put in the state or country that you're from, so that we can help link you to the official

registries."

In the "health and wellness" section of users' timelines, users can list their status as organ donors and explain the decision to their friends, in an effort to raise awareness about the need for donors.

"Today, more than 114,000 people in the United States, and millions more around the globe, are waiting for the heart, kidney or liver transplant that will save their lives," Zuckerberg said in a statement with Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg.

An estimated 18 people die every day from the lack of available organs, according to Donate Life America, a nonprofit alliance that is partnering with Facebook.

"We can't thank Facebook enough for the organization's commitment to helping save lives by encouraging Americans to register as organ, eye and tissue donors...Thousands of lives will be saved or healed as a result of this initiative," said David Fleming, president and chief executive of Donate Life America.

"We want to encourage every Facebook user to take a moment and update their timeline, register to be a donor, and share their decision with family and friends. It is a simple way to provide hope for those in need."

Zuckerberg, 27, who is known for avoiding the public limelight, disclosed some details of his personal life in the ABC interview, describing his chats with girlfriend Priscilla Chan that helped lead to the donation initiative.

"She's in medical school now," Zuckerberg said of Chan.

"She's going to be a pediatrician, so our dinner conversations are often about Facebook and the kids that she's meeting."

He told ABC that Chan told him about patients she meets "getting sicker as they don't have the organ that they need" and other fortunate cases where children ultimately received transplants. Zuckerberg called the accounts "unbelievable."

Describing one case of a boy needing a heart transplant, Chan told Zuckerberg the boy's skin had turned blue from lack of oxygen, but within weeks of receiving a transplant he was out again playing sports.

"How can that not make you happy?" he said.

Zuckerberg also said the death of Steve Jobs, whom he called a "friend," helped inspire the project.

"That definitely, I think, was something that we all had in mind as we were building this out," Zuckerberg said. "His story is just one of many, of people who both were able to have an organ transplant that made his life longer and he was extremely thankful for that."

Jobs died on October 5 of pancreatic cancer at the age of 56. But his life was extended by a liver transplant in 2009 that enabled him to return to the helm of Apple.

The number of people using Facebook had risen to 901 million by the end of the quarter, according to company documents.

Facebook is expected to make its much-anticipated stock market debut in the coming weeks in a public offering which could raise as much as \$10 billion, the largest flotation ever by an Internet company on Wall Street.

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