THE JOURNEY FROM DONOR TO RECIPIENT

The Initial Call
An eye bank receives a call from a hospital, an organ procurement organization or another third party that an individual has died and has met preliminary criteria for donation. The eye bank has a very short time within which to contact the next of kin, obtain consent and recover the tissue. This generally needs to happen within 12-24 hours of the time of death.

Consent and Medical Review
If the individual is a registered organ/eye/tissue donor, in most cases the eye bank can immediately proceed to recover his/her corneas. Otherwise, the eye bank will contact the next of kin to obtain consent for donation. In either case, the eye bank will contact the next of kin to obtain a medical-social history. The medical-social history provides the eye bank with information to make a donor eligibility determination. The eye bank also obtains copies of relevant medical records from the hospital.

Physical Inspection of the Donor
If there are not any medical "rule outs," an eye bank technician will travel to the donor’s location (typically a hospital or morgue) to recover his/her corneas. The first step is a physical inspection of the donor. This contributes to the donor profile, and screens for signs of infectious disease or behavior that may have put them at risk, such as intravenous drug use. The technician also draws a blood sample to be tested for HIV, Hepatitis, Syphilis and other blood-borne diseases, which would disqualify a donor.

Recovery
The donor is then prepared for the procedure to recover the cornea. The technician dons a sterile gown and gloves, and drapes the donor’s eyes to establish a sterile field. After removing the corneas, they are placed in a storage medium to keep the tissue viable. The technician then transports the cornea to the eye bank's laboratory for further evaluation.

Evaluation
Specially trained technicians evaluate the cornea through microscopes to check for damage or deformities and to ensure that it meets the eye bank's criteria for transplantation. The eye bank's medical director or his/her designee reviews this information, as well as the donor's medical records, and makes a final eligibility determination.

Preparation for Transplant
If the cornea is authorized for transplant, it will be held at the eye bank for up to 14 days, pending a request from a surgeon. Upon request, trained eye bank technicians will cut the tissue to surgeon’s specifications. The cornea is then packaged and labeled with a unique identification number to allow the eye bank to track the tissue, and is delivered to the surgeon.

Transplant Surgery
Whether performed in a hospital or an ambulatory surgery center, corneal transplants are typically outpatient surgeries and take approximately one hour. Depending on the type of disease and transplant procedure, patients can recover their sight in a matter of days or weeks.