An unforeseen result of the opioid crisis has been an increase in organ donations from people who have died from overdose — providing hope from tragic loss and the opportunity for families to create a lasting legacy of their loved ones.

Since 2012, the number of organ donors has increased from 8,143 to 10,721 total donors, and from 411 to 1,356 drug intoxication donors. 13% of all donors in 2018 were from drug intoxication deaths.

After increasing from 5% to 12% of total donors from 2012 to 2016, the number of drug intoxication donors has leveled off.

A study of organ donation and drug intoxicated-related deaths in the United States in the New England Journal of Medicine finds that public education plays an important role in the recovery of these organs.

While the opioid crisis has unquestionably contributed to recent record-breaking years for organ donation, it alone does not account for the increase in donors.

Nationally, organ donation from deceased donors has increased since 2012 by 32%. Factoring out drug intoxication donors, there was still a 21% increase in donors during this time.

In a continually changing environment, OPOs consistently deliver innovative, sensitive, and quality care to the community.

Responding to the opioid crisis

OPOs across the country have worked to understand and support the unique needs of families who have "lost a loved one to overdose, as well as to provide more public and clinical education about the fact that drug addiction and overdose do not rule out the opportunity for organ donation.

Through the efforts of OPOs, working in partnership with community organizations, hospitals and transplant programs, the unfortunate increase in drug-related deaths in recent years has contributed to an increase in organ donors and successful organ transplants.