

# The Media and the Message

## FIRST-YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT CALISTA

Harbaugh, from South Lyon, Michigan, along with surgeon Mike Englesbe, M.D., and other students, completed a study last year called “Portrayal of Organ Donation and Transplantation on American Primetime Television,” which will be published in the journal *Clinical Transplantation*. The study attracted the attention of Donate Life Hollywood, a California-based organization lobbying for more accurate portrayal of organ donation and transplantation in the media.

INTERVIEW BY WHITLEY HILL

PHOTO BY J. ADRIAN WYLIE

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## THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND

the project is the critical shortage of organs available for transplant. We wanted to look at television medical dramas to see what messages are out there about organ donation.

“In an episode of ‘Grey’s Anatomy,’ the transplant surgeon walked through the ER to see if anyone was nearing brain dead, so she could use the organs for her own patient. It played on the myth that doctors are ‘vultures,’ hungry for organs. Millions of viewers saw that message! But we found many positive themes, too.

“Donate Life Hollywood was excited about the study because it showed that there’s actually been some improvement in the media over the past few years. But that doesn’t change the fact that there are still many people who have not registered as organ donors. A lot of people just haven’t checked that box.

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—CALISTA HARBAUGH

