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# Should organ donations be mandated?

By Fanita Durham

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Organ donation refers to the re-use of bodily parts (like kidneys, hearts, or livers). The body parts are transplanted into the bodies of patients who need replacement organs. Decisions are made about who can receive donated organs based on the severity of health needs.

Everyday around 77 people in the US receive a life saving organ transplant, while another 19 people die waiting for an organ donor. Currently there are over 100,000 people on the waitlist to receive organ transplants. Due to shortages in available organs, a number of these people will die unnecessarily.

Countries such as Belgium, France, Switzerland and Austria practice presumed consent that mandates organ donation unless individuals register to refuse to be donors. In the US, the decision to donate organs is based on individual wishes or consent from next of kin.

An organization known as The Presumed Consent Foundation have recommended mandating organ donations in the US similar to many other countries. Under this policy, family members would be informed of the organ donation wishes of the deceased, but would be unable to override the decision.

Organ donation expert Dr. Susan E. Morgan states, "I would like to see the U.S. do some pilot studies that use incentives to see if this would enhance donation rates. Possibilities include contributions toward a loved one's funeral, donation to a charity, etc. I've been in meetings of the Advisory Committee on Transplantation where this has been discussed and I understand that there are potential problems and complications with this approach, but I think it's worth trying. I'm not sure that the U.S. is ready (now or in the foreseeable future) for presumed consent because we have such a strongly individualistic culture-- and because we have a high degree of medical mistrust-- neither of which is necessarily true for even European countries. I think medical advances for healing diseased organs will progress more quickly than significant changes in American culture."

Though mandating organ donations is controversial, it would drastically increase the availability of organs to those who desperately need them. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, each organ and tissue donor saves or can improve the lives of as many as 50 people. Giving what they call the "Gift of Life" can provide closure for families of donors who realize they are helping others.

Research suggests that there are number of barriers that can limit organ donation. Religious beliefs, family values, medical mistrust, lack of knowledge about donations and fears about being pronounced dead prematurely are all potential barriers. However, these concerns can be effectively addressed through communication.

Encouraging organ donations with targeted communication campaigns can help increase individual support for

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It is important to educate people about organ donations. While mandating donations may be one solution, it is not the only approach to take. Attempts to increase awareness, specifically among family (who ultimately have the last word in many donation situations), can provide the information and support necessary to encourage voluntary organ donations.

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**Gary Kreps** (3 years ago)

Thanks for the interesting article Fanita. We need to do a much better job communicating the benefits of organ donation to the public. It is an opportunity to save lives and significantly help people in need that is very easy for people to do.

[Reply](#)**Harumi Gondo** (3 years ago)

Another fear could also be cosmetic...the fear that organ donation would prevent the possibility of an open casket funeral. Is this the case?

[Reply](#)**Irina Ibragimova** (4 years ago)

very informative article! very important topic!

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