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By Wesley J. Smith

PatExp

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Transplant Community Should Stop Blaming Others About Public's Doubts About Organ Donation

Posted May 18 2009 11:10pm



A poll has come out about the public's attitudes toward organ donation that allegedly shows us as ignorant and unduly distrustful of the system. I think this requires a closer look. From the story "[Lingering Myths Discourage Organ Donation](#)":

Only 38% of licensed drivers have joined their states' organ donor registries, with many deterred by long-held misconceptions about how the transplant system works, according to poll results released in April. The survey of 5,100 American adults, conducted on behalf of the organ-donation advocacy group Donate Life America, found that:

50% think that registering as organ donors means physicians will not try as hard to save their lives.

Perhaps that is because people realize that medical ethics have taken a distinct utilitarian turn in recent years, what with futile care theory and health care rationing in the offing. Knowing that

people with severe cognitive disabilities are being disdained by some as "non persons" and [looked upon as potential natural resources](#), adds to the fear. It is unreasonable to expect folk to compartmentalize organ donation from the rest of the problems with health care.

44% say there is a black market in the U.S. for organs or tissue.

That's because some people like Mickey Mantle seem to be able to avoid the triage system. Besides, there is a black market overseas at which some Americans go shopping.

26% believe that patients determined to be brain dead can recover from their injuries.

Perhaps that is because the criteria utilized to declare [death by neurological criteria are not uniform throughout the country](#) and in at least a few cases, supposedly brain dead people "woke up." Also, too many people in the media use the term "brain death" far too loosely, such as [calling Terri Schiavo brain dead](#), when, before she was dehydrated to death, she was clearly alive.

Rather than look in the mirror for the causes of these "myths," the medical community seems to blame Hollywood:

Many in the transplant community blame the popularity of these

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misconceptions on Hollywood movies and TV shows that wrongly portray the organ donation and transplantation process...Susan E. Morgan, PhD, professor of communication at Purdue University in Indiana, has done extensive research showing how these story lines affect people's views of organ donation. She said the transplant community needs to tackle these myths head-on in its publicity campaigns, instead of focusing primarily on the benefits of transplantation.

Physician heal thyself: If the transplant community got its act together across the country--and adamantly shot down the many proposals made in the world's most respected medical journals to open the door to killing for organs--the public might be less wary.

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