

Socio-cultural acceptability of cadaver Transplantation in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Organ transplantation is known to be a new and innovative treatment for patients with progressive organ failures. The present study investigates the current status of transplantation from cadaver along with its socio-cultural acceptability in Iran. The present study is a descriptive research in a systematic review method. Here, by investigating previously conducted researches in Iran during the period 2002-2010, the status of transplantation from cadaver and its socio-cultural acceptability in Iran has been investigated. To collect the data, the access to Iranmedex website, the premier medical data center in Iran, was made possible using the related keywords. The obtained data indicate whereas there is an increase in the number of organ donations from cadaver, it is still low in comparison to other countries. The lack of consent from families of brain-dead patients is a major hurdle on the way of organ transplantation in Iran. In the cases of willingness to donate organs, the major effective factors were the deceased's religious beliefs and prior tendency. In 66% of the cases, the donors' families deemed organ donation phenomenon effective in alleviating the sorrow after the death of their beloved ones. The number of organ donation from cadaver in Iran is low contrary to other countries. It seems that general instructions to raise the knowledge on the subject and lay the foundation to increase the tendency towards posthumous organ donation are necessary.

Keywords: transplantation, cadaver, organ donation, Iran

INTRODUCTION

Organ transplantation has been known as a newly emerged treatment for patients with serious organ failure. It is currently, and at times, the only treatment for many serious diseases ^[1]. Since the purpose by organ transplantation is to cure effectively of diseases in the long run, medical science has paid special attention to organ transplantation in recent years, so that it has improved the frightening perspective of patients facing amputation in their last moments ^[2]. Organ transplantation has managed to improve the patients' quality of life and their vision for the future ^[3, 4]. A successful transplantation not only increases the life expectancy and quality, but also proves effective in reducing health expenses ^[5]. Thus, the demand for such a treatment and the number of patients in need of transplantation has increased 70% more than the past ^[6]. According to a report by The Journal of Medical Services and Resources, there are around 18000, 1800, and 200 individuals waiting to receive kidney, heart and lung respectively at a given day ^[7].

In United States, annually 20000 peoples suffering from because of trauma but only 15% of them donate their organs. In other hand, 34000 kidneys, 17000 hearts, lungs, livers and pancreases are destroyed ^[8]. Statistical studies have shown that the difference between the people number in the waiting list and available organs is increasing ^[9]. Depending on the type of the disease, 10 to 25% of the patients in need on the waiting list die without receiving the organ.¹

According to a report by Iran's Ministry of Health, more than 15000 brain deaths occur annually as a result of accidents while less than 10% of them are included as organ donors ^[10].

Based on the statistics provided by the official website of TPM, in 2008, the number of individuals donating after brain death in Spain, Italy, Brazil, and Iran were 34.3, 21.1, 7.2, and 3 in one million people respectively ^[11].

In the studies conducted in Iran among general population and medical staff, the views on organ donation are varied. For instance, in a study on citizens of Tehran, 93% agreed with organ donation, and 88% were willing to fill out organ donation forms ^[12]. Another study in Ahvaz demonstrated 75% willingness and tendency to donate organs ^[13], whereas 68% of the subjects in Tabriz were unwilling to donate organs or fill out the relevant forms ^[14].

Although an evaluation of the public opinion illustrates great support for organ donation ^[15], the families' unwillingness to give consent still remains to be the major obstacle on organ donation ^[16].

In another study in Kerman (Iran) by Dr. Ghadie Pasha et al, the most important reasons given for the opposition to organ donation were the lack of sufficient facilities to train the doctors involved in the issue, as around half of the subjects were not sufficiently informed on organ donation which

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testified there were no effective measures taken in this regard^[17].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current research is a descriptive study as a systematic review. By considering the published articles within the period 2002-2010 in Iran, transplantation from cadaver together with its socio-cultural acceptability and factors affecting reception or rejection of organ donation in various regions of Iran have been investigated. To have access to the data, the researchers attempted to collect data by reference to Iranmedex data center, otherwise known as the premier source of information on medical sciences publications (visited on the web at www.iranmedex.com). To search in the website, key words such as “brain death”, “transplantation from cadaver”, “organ donation”, and “organ transplantation acceptability” were used. The obtained articles were carefully considered as the sources of information for the researchers, and the current findings derived.

RESULTS

According to the results, 545 articles on organ donation in Iran were obtained, 35 of which being related to transplantation from cadaver. The findings of the research indicate that the number of organ donations in Iran has been significantly increased from 2002 to 2010 (Figure 1). The results showed that despite a large number of brain deaths caused by accidents in Iran less than 15% of them were among donors, with more than two third of the families of the brain dead patients unwilling to donate their patients’ organs. Further, the collected data indicate that despite having a positive attitude towards the organ donation phenomenon among various groups, individuals’ performance is not positive in all instances. In such cases, the findings have considered the positive effect of education in raising public awareness on organ donation.

Religious belief and prior consent are found to be major decision factors for donation. The family members of donors considered donation phenomenon effective in alleviating the sorrow following the death.

DISCUSSION

In general, one of the major obstacles on organ donation in Iran is the unwillingness of the family and closed relatives of the brain dead patient. According to the studies, around 2.3 Iranian families refuse to donate organs of their close relatives. The level of dissatisfaction among families of the brain dead patients differs from country to country. It has been less than 20% in some countries like Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Spain, Cuba, and Norway; between 20-50% in Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil;

and more than 50% in Panama and Turkey^[18, 19]. Moreover, it has been reported 52% in US and 60% in England^[20, 21]. Also according to the statistical studies in 1995, the number of transplantations were about 20 thousands whereas 8 thousands in Asian countries^[17].

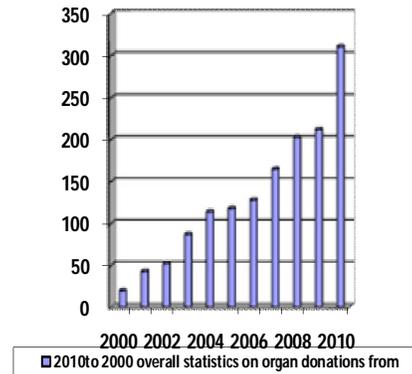


Figure 1: Numbers of organ donation in Iran from 2000 to 2010

Lack of funding, responsibility of politicians, bureaucracy and necessary legislation, shortage of professional organizations responsible for the various religious and lack of public acceptance of organ donation after brain death were crucial reasons in Asian countries^[22, 23].

Studies conducted in Iran consider factors such as religious beliefs, confidence in the group treatment, care, contradiction, doubt, the deceased beliefs, pain and disability to be effective in family’s decision making on approval or disapproval of donating organs of the brain-dead patients. Meanwhile, being aware of the deceased’s religious beliefs and ideas had the highest positive effect by easing the decision making of the families. Religious beliefs had been pointed as the major factor affecting this issue^[24]. It seems that religious beliefs as well as faith in the afterlife among Muslims are important determining factors in convincing the families to decide prudently in that matter. Also according to Rossen et al, when family members know about the deceased’s decision to donate organs, it is easy for them to decide to pursue the deceased’s wishes and consent to the donation of organs^[25]. As to the deterrent factors, of the major issues reported are dissatisfaction with and lack of confidence in the medical system and group treatment. Non-donor families were dissatisfied with the medical staff’s style of notification regarding the brain dead patients’ condition as they believed in their survival. These findings confirm to those by Broogs et al and Klern^[26, 27]. Further, the interval between the donation request and announcement of the brain death, preferably after calling the time of death, is more effective on the tendency to donate^[24]. Notification by nurses brings about a number of brain dead donors, requiring appropriate awareness of the transplantation. Nurses are the first people

who observe and report the critical symptoms of brain death to the doctors [7, 26, 27]. As regards the deterrent factors, the findings of Broogs et al demonstrated that making decisions in isolation causes individuals to experience less convenience and confidence in their decisions [26]. In a study by Alexi et al when a donation coordinator made the request, more positive responses were reported. In justification of the subject, he states that staffs of organ provider organizations (donation coordinators) are more committed and accountable in dealing with the families and have a more comprehensive knowledge on brain death [28]. Findings of another study by Rodrigo et al indicate that when the deceased's prior tendency to donate is not obvious; decision-making is affected by other variables usually with the result of refusal in numerous instances [29]. The findings indicate that although organ donation carries no effect on the depression of the family members, donor families find it effective in alleviating the sorrow of losing a beloved one which confirms to the findings of Pearson et al [30]. In a study in England in 1985 through a comprehensive educational program on raising the public awareness on brain death and organ donation phenomenon, there had been success in raising the number of donors by 16% following the instances of brain death from 1986 to 1988 [29, 31]. Our findings indicate that the role of transplantation coordinators in encouraging the families of the brain dead patients to donate is of utmost significance. To this aim, their role would be highlighted by increasing the notification and raising the awareness in the society on the success of transplantations and the humanistic view of Islam towards organ donation.

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