

TRANSPLANT ACCEPTABILITY AMONG THE STUDENTS OF SIBIU FACULTY OF MEDICINE

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Keywords: bioethics, transplant, opinion survey, students in the medical field

Abstract: The issue pertaining to organ removal/receiving, be they from living or declared dead persons, still remains a current matter. Our opinion survey applied to 745 students from the Faculty of Medicine, within “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu (with the help of a questionnaire consisting in 10 closed, factual and opinion questions) showed a high degree of transplant acceptability among these students. Organ removal from living persons is considered acceptable by 89.80% of the respondents, while the same procedure, in the case of deceased persons, reaches even higher percentages of acceptance: 92.75%. The willingness to receive organs from a living person also reached a high quota (92.21%), but there still is a certain degree of reluctance in accepting organs from a deceased (although the percentage of acceptability is high – 85.64%, it is still lower than in the case of a living person).

Cuvinte cheie: bioetică, transplant, sondaj de opinie, studenți în domeniul medical

Rezumat: Problema acceptabilității prelevării/primirii de organe, fie de la persoana în viață, fie de la cea declarată decedată, rămâne de actualitate. Sondajul de opinie pe care l-am realizat în rândul a 745 de studenți din cadrul Facultății de Medicină – Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu (utilizând un chestionar alcătuit din 10 întrebări factuale și de opinie, de tip închis) a arătat că în rândul acestora există un grad înalt de acceptabilitate a transplantului. Realizarea prelevării de la persoane în viață este acceptată de 89,80% dintre respondenți, iar cea de la cadavru în proporție și mai mare, de 92,75%. La cote înalte se află și disponibilitatea de a primi organe de la o persoană în viață (92,21%), însă există un oarecare grad de reticență în a accepta organe prelevate de la cadavru (procentul de acceptabilitate fiind ridicat – 85,64%, dar mai redus decât în cazul primirii de la o persoană în viață).

INTRODUCTION

The human body is sacred, intangible and demands respect not only in life but also in death; under no circumstances is it allowed to become an object of commerce, be it partly or as a whole. Numerous sources of law (international documents pertaining to human rights, the Patients’ Bill of Rights no. 46 of 2003, the Law no. 95 of 2006 on Health Reform, the medical ethical guidelines etc.) provide explicit protection in this sense, stating the obligation to protect human dignity, as well as the need to respect the physical integrity of the person.

In the field of transplantation, the regulations specific to our country are contained under Title VI of The Law no. 95 of 2006 on Health Reform, entitled “Removal and transplantation of organs, tissues and cells of human origin for therapeutic purposes”.⁽¹⁾ It contains detailed regulations concerning the conditions for the removal of organs from a live or deceased donor, as well as the conditions to be complied with by the recipient (the receiver of the transplant). Both the donor and the receiver have to strictly adhere to the norms of conduct relating to informed consent. The consent must be given in writing, explicitly and expressly. It needs to be valid, originating from an adult with full legal capacity, based on thorough knowledge of the risks and consequences of the removal on the physical, psychological, family and professional levels and must also be uncorrupted by physical/moral coercion or by any other gain, be it material or otherwise; it is reversible up to the removal time. The law also states that the motivation of organ donation can only be humanitarian and altruistic.

Concerning the deceased donor, not only the way death is declared (including the brain death declaration protocol) is imperative, but also the necessity of obtaining the agreement of the caretakers – in the case the deceased person did not declare during his/her lifetime that he/she agreed to organ donation.⁽¹⁾

Even if these regulations appear to cover all the important aspects, they are not by themselves sufficient to solve the complex problems of moral nature in relation to the transplantation procedure. The ethical dilemma arises from the “collision” between two widely acknowledged values: one of individual essence (bodily integrity) and the other with a strong social determinism (human solidarity).⁽²⁾ The altruistic and completely unselfish character of this humanitarian act is the main reason that this particular medical technology has gained acceptance on behalf of the Orthodox Church, even while many other cutting-edge medical procedures are being challenged by representatives of the clergy.

PURPOSE

In this context, an issue of vital interest for the optimal implementation of transplantation programmes is represented by the degree of acceptance from the part of the population. All ethical debates, all the laws and regulations, no matter how relevant, would be unable to solve the dilemma described above, if there would be no individual readiness to donate or no consent of the caretakers to the procedure of organ removal from the deceased.

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This is why we considered it necessary to investigate the degree of acceptability of transplantation.

METHODS

We particularly targeted student groups from various medical specializations for two reasons: firstly because they are future health professionals - some of them may be directly involved in carrying out transplant programmes - and secondly, because we wanted to find out to what extent their medical education/training leads (or does not lead) to a greater acceptance of the transplant.

We proceeded to conduct a prospective, observational-descriptive study, consisting in applying a specially designed questionnaire, made up of 10 closed, factual and opinion questions:

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Gender | male/female |
| 2. Age | years |
| 3. Area of origin | urban/rural |
| 4. Studies | |
| 5. Religion: orthodox / roman catholic / Greek-catholic / evangelical / other | |
| 6. Practitioner of this religion | yes/no |
| 7. Do you agree to organ removal from a living person? | yes/no |
| 8. Do you agree to organ removal from a dead person, for the purpose of transplantation? | yes/no |
| 9. In case of medical necessity, would you agree to receive an organ transplant from a living person? | yes/no |
| 10. In case of medical necessity, would you agree to receive an organ transplant from a dead person? | yes/no |

The questionnaire was anonymously applied to 745 students of the Faculty of Medicine – “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The 745 respondents were first to sixth year students, studying the following fields:

- Medicine, 1st year – 111 students (14.90%);
- Medicine, 2nd year – 121 students (16.24%);
- Dental Medicine, 3rd year – 68 students (9.13%);
- Medicine, 4th year – 107 students (14.36%);
- General Nursing, 3rd year – 31 students (4.16%);
- General Nursing, 4th year – 33 students (4.43%);
- General Nursing, 4th year (continued studies) – 139 students (18.66%);
- Dental Medicine, 5th year – 63 students (8.46%);
- Medicine, 6th year – 72 students (9.66%).

Thus, more than half (411 – 55.17%) belonged to Medicine field of study, over a quarter (203 – 27.25%) to General Nursing, the rest (131 – 17.58%) being students in Dental Medicine.

The gender distribution of the 745 respondents showed a clear predominance of females (explainable by the fact that the above mentioned fields of study are mainly chosen by the representatives of this gender); only 166 respondents were males (22.28%) and 579 females (77.72%), with a sex ratio F/M of 3.49:1.

We also noticed a significant predominance of the urban area of origin (619 students – 83.09%), over the rural one (126 students – 16.91%), with a U/R ratio of 4.91:1.

In terms of age distribution, given the structure of the examined target group (students from the 1st to 6th year), there was a natural preponderance of those in the 20-24 years age group (468 students – 62.82%). However, given that nearly one-fifth of the respondents were part of General Nursing 4th year (also frequented by students having more advanced ages), we

recorded the respondents belonging to a wide range of age groups: between 15-19 years old, 35 (4.70%); 25-29 years old, 81 (10.87%); 30-34 years old, 25 (3.36%); 35-39 years old, 68 (9.13%); 40-44 years old, 42 (5.64%); 45-49 years old, 20 (2.68%); 50-54 years old: 6 (0.80%).

Religious affiliation of the respondents has complied with the specific distribution of the Romanian society, with a high frequency of Orthodox religion (647 students – 86.85%); only 98 of the respondents (13.15%) belonged to other religions/denominations as follows: Roman Catholic – 19 (2.55%); Evangelical – 18 (2.42%); Baptist – 11 (1.48%); Muslim – 10 (1.34%); Pentecostal – 9 (1.21%); Christian brethren – 7; Reformed – 6; Adventist – 5; Greek-Catholic – 3; No religion (“I do not have one”; “atheist”) – 3; Mosaic – 2; Unitarian – 1; 4 cases of unspecified religion.

The Orthodox religion/other religion ratio was 6.60:1.

Over three-quarters of the respondents declared themselves practitioners of their religion (578 students – 77.58%), only 22.42% (167 students) declaring themselves as non-practitioners (practitioner/non-practitioner ratio of 3.46:1).

To the question “Do you agree to organ removal from a living person?” the answer has been “Yes” in a high proportion of 89.80% (669 respondents); only 76 of respondents (10.20%) did not agree with the removal of organs from living persons.

In terms of harvesting organs from the deceased, we noticed an even higher degree of acceptability: to the question “Do you agree to organ removal from a dead person, for the purpose of transplantation?” the answer was “Yes” for 92.75% (691 students) of the respondents. We received only 54 negative responses, accounting for 7.25% of the total respondent group.

Moreover, we recorded a high share of affirmative answers to the question “In case of medical necessity, would you agree to receiving an organ transplant from a living person?”: 687 (92.21%) of respondents would consent to this procedure. Only 58 students (7.79%) have given a negative response to this question.

Inherently (considering the natural instinct of self-preservation), the degree of acceptability of an organ transplant from a living person increases when it comes to one’s own well being: the degree of acceptance increased from 89.80% (when it represented an agreement in principle with such a procedure) to 92.21% (where a certain pathology would require the respondent himself to require a transplant from another living person).

We noticed however a reluctance to receive organs from those who are declared deceased, in case of a medical necessity that would require such a procedure. Although the number of affirmative answers to the question “In case of medical necessity, would you agree to receive an organ transplant from a dead person?” was prevalent (638 students – 85.64%), we recorded nonetheless the highest rate of negative responses. Refusal to receive organs from deceased persons was present in a number of 107 respondents (14.36%) - almost double the negative replies received to the similar question regarding receipt of organs from living persons (58 cases – 7.79%).

The overall analysis of the survey results clearly shows a high acceptability rate of the transplantation procedure among the questioned students. These results are consistent with the ones recorded in other similar studies, conducted in other universities.

Thus, an opinion survey conducted in Braşov (4), with 124 respondents - medical personnel (physicians and nurses) from Braşov Clinical Emergency Hospital and students of Braşov Faculty of Medicine - showed that the transplantation acceptability degree ranged between 67.74% (“Would you agree

with someone you love becoming an organ donor?") and 82.25% ("Would you yourself accept to donate organs?").

A similar study, conducted at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Tîrgu-Mureş, has centralized the views of 247 students of Medicine.⁽⁵⁾ 81.8% (more than the European average of 55%) have expressed their consent to donate an organ of their own after death. Acceptability was smaller with regards to consenting to receive organs from a close person who passed away; nonetheless 65.6% of the respondents consented. This percentage also surpassed the European average (of 53%).

CONCLUSIONS

The acceptance of removing/receiving organs either from a living person, or from those who are declared dead, remains a highly current matter.

The survey that we conducted among 745 students of the Faculty of Medicine ("Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu) showed a high degree of transplantation acceptability.

Organ removal from living persons is considered acceptable by 89.80% of the respondents, while the same procedure, in the case of deceased persons, reaches even higher percentages of acceptance: 92.75%. The willingness to receive organs from a living person also reached a high quota (92.21%), but there still is a certain degree of reluctance in accepting organs from a deceased (although the percentage of acceptability is high – 85.64%, it is still lower than in the case of a living person).

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