Non-organ donors’ attitudes toward incentives

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Abstract: Malaysians indicating that they did not intend to become organ donors upon their death were surveyed regarding interest in nonfungible financial incentives to be granted to surviving family members. Among the 730 (56% of the total sample of 1311) indicating unwillingness to be donors, 29.6% (216/730) subsequently indicated that they would be willing donors if the government introduced policies that, upon their death, “rewarded your (their) family with incentives for your (their) deeds.” Among the 69% (504/730) who insisted that they would not become organ donor even with incentive, nearly 80% (404/501) of them were able to identify relevant incentives they thought should be provided by the state to those who make organ donations upon death.
The majority of both groups preferred the state provide medical benefits to a surviving family member, suggesting this may be an attractive policy option for the state to raise the deceased organ donation pool.

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The shortage of organs available for transplantation is a global concern, both because it puts at risk those people waiting for organs and because the growing demand for organs has given rise to global commercialization of organs that has sparked ethical concerns as “patient-tourists” from more developed countries seek organ donors from developing countries. In Malaysia, the rate of organ donation from deceased donors – about 0.48 donations per million populations (1) – is inadequate to meet the expectation of over 15,000 patients who are waiting for organs (2). Not surprisingly then, Malaysia is among the many countries that are seeing increasing number of its kidney patients seeking renal transplants outside the country, especially in countries like China and India – two countries wherein the high number of organ transplants involving foreigners suggest organ trading (3).

One way of tackling both sides of this problem is by aggressively pursuing organ donation from the deceased. Accordingly, the Istanbul Declaration on Organ Trafficking and Transplant Tourism 2008 re-emphasized the importance of raising deceased organ donation to reduce the risk of organ commercialism by calling on governments to establish policies to increase deceased donations (4). In fact, Malaysia had incentivizing organ and tissue donation from the deceased under Article 3.5 of the National Organ, Tissue and Cell Transplantation Policy, established in June 2007. Therein, the state pledged to bear the funeral expenses incurred by the family of a deceased donor provided that such organ donation is carried out by bodies recognized by the Ministry of Health (5). However, as indicated previously, the results have been inadequate, thus raising a host of questions, for Malaysia and more generally, about the