Factors That Hinder Organ Donation: Religio-Cultural or Lack of Information and Trust

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Abstract

Objectives: This paper examines factors that influence Malaysian persons with a tertiary level of education on their willingness to donate organs.

Materials and Methods: A survey was done in the Klang Valley (Kuala Lumpur and its suburbs) at several designated locations. A total of 1420 people were approached, and we focused the sample of 688 respondents with a tertiary level of education. Respondents were given 2 sets of answers: (1) a religio-cultural category and (2) a structural category. They were allowed to choose more than 1 reason.

Results: Our findings revealed that only 47.5 percent of respondents declined becoming organ donors. The highest frequency recorded was “I am not convinced that my body part will be used beneficially” (30.1%), followed by “I do not have enough access to information” (29.2%), “I want my body to remain intact after death” (16.9%), and “It is against my religion” (9.9%).

Conclusions: Our study revealed that religio-cultural factors are not a prime explanation for the lack of organ donation in the Malaysian case. This study suggests that better procurement methods used by dedicated agencies, as well as better education, could reduce the shortage between organ supply and demand.

Key words: Organ donation, Donation rate, Education, Public awareness, Malaysia

Introduction

The gap between organ supply and demand for transplant is a global concern. As of May 2012, Malaysia has some 15399 patients awaiting organ transplant, with kidney patients topping the list.1 Malaysia has one of the lowest deceased organ donation rates. In 2010, the organ donation rate stood at 0.48 donations per million population, lower compared to countries like Spain (34.13), the United States (26.27), the United Kingdom (14.70), and Australia (12.10).2

The growing number of patients on the waiting list and the shortage in organ donation come despite Malaysia’s efforts to narrow the gap in supply and demand for organs. In 1974, Malaysia introduced the Human Tissue Act to facilitate organ donation, followed by a national transplant program in 1975. In 2007, it strengthened existing transplant policy by introducing the National Organ, Tissue and Cell Transplantation Policy. In 2011, the government issued a policy and procedures to embark on “unrelated living donation.”

Aside from formal enactments to facilitate organ donation, Malaysia also embarked on a public relation drive to raise public awareness of organ donation. Since 1999, it established the Action Committee for Public Awareness on Organ Donation, which involved healthcare providers at both the state and federal level. There were several program done under this initiative: using living donors as role models in campaigns, organizing talk shows to raise public awareness, and having an organ awareness week by organizing sports events. These efforts have not turned in the desired result, judging from the low number of Malaysians