

Critical questions for physicians on the ethics of organ transplants

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Transplant specialists' success has created demand for their expertise, despite organ shortages. But how do you solve the ethical questions of organ donation when each transplant requires a voluntary sacrifice from another human being? Learn how physicians are grappling with these questions and the ways the medical community is looking to increase organ donation.



The February issue of the *AMA Journal of Ethics* explores the key ethical concepts for professionals and patients in transplant medicine, including consent, extended criteria organs, regulatory oversight and donor incentives.

Articles featured in this issue include:

- “How to communicate clearly about brain death and first-person consent to donate.” Even when a patient gives clear donor consent, how can physicians also communicate openly

and avoid confusion among family members who may be struggling to accept the inevitable death of their loved one?

“Ethical considerations of transplantation and living donation for patients with alcoholic liver diseases.” Given organ shortages and social and cultural stigmas that surround alcohol abuse, equal access can be a difficult goal to maintain when patients present with taboo illnesses. What should physicians prioritize when making transplantation decisions for patients with alcoholic liver disease?

“Should physicians attempt to persuade a patient to accept a compromised organ for transplant?” The donor population is not necessarily always healthy, but when an organ with compromised quality is available, the physician must offer the best advice to the patient regarding risk while also respecting that patient’s autonomy.

“Technology- and policy-based strategies for increasing supply of deceased donor livers.” Many strategies for increasing organ supplies—both policy-based and technological—have been proven successful. What are the next steps for global education efforts to raise organ donation awareness?

In the journal’s February podcast, Dorry Segev, MD, associate professor of surgery at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, discusses whether current organ allocation policy contributes to disparities in access, possible ways to maximize equity, and what physicians should advise their patients to do between policy changes.

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