

Govt soon to put together proper organ transplant system

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Come July and the country is set to take first major step towards putting in place an organised organ transplantation mechanism. Taking a cue from Spain, which has the world's highest rate of organ donation at an impressive 34 donors per million people, the Health Ministry is for the first time initiating a procedure to e-network all hospitals to harvest organs and reduce reliance on living donation through the cadaver (dead human body) organ donation programme.

Ironically, India's dubious distinction of having the highest number of road accidents — over one lakh every year — will also serve the cause as the plans include targeting the brain dead victims of road accidents. Brain death is the irreversible end of all brain activity (including involuntary activity necessary to sustain life) due to loss of blood flow and oxygenation. The patient is clinically dead and vital organs are supported by a life support system.

As envisaged by Transplantation of Human Organ and Tissue Bill, cleared by the Cabinet and awaiting Parliament's nod, a record of such brain deaths will be kept while families will be encouraged to donate organs of the brain dead patients.

The Planning Commission has already approved ₹15 crore for the Model Organ Procurement and Distribution Organisation (MOPTDO) to be set up as a nodal agency to execute the task under the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) of the Health Ministry for which posts are being presently created.

Under the MOPTDO, a pilot project will soon be launched in Delhi wherein 20 major hospitals, including



PRESENT POSITION

Organ	Demand	Supply
Kidney	1,00,000	5,000
Liver	50,000	200-250
Heart	50,000	4-5
Eye	1,00,000	25-40,000

(Annual figures)

Batra, GB Pant, Safdarjung, AIIMS, Institute of Liver and Bellaries, R&R Army Hospital, Stephan's, Sir Ganga Ram, Moolchand, Max Balaji and BL Kapoor Memorial Hospital will be networked.

Dr Anant Kumar, Director of urology and kidney transplantation department at New Delhi's Fortis Group of Hospital and an expert in the area of organ donation said, "The step is in the right direction and would save many people from dying while awaiting organ transplantation. It would also encourage sensitivity among people to donate organs. Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have already successfully taken such steps." Last year, Tamil Nadu alone registered 59 cadaver transplants. This is 10 times the national average.

Once the Bill is cleared by Parliament, the network will be extended to cover the entire country for harvesting organ with retrieval procurement and transportation centres.

The hospitals will be asked to conduct post-mortems round-the-clock to save the crucial time to make organs usable since once a patient is declared brain dead, almost 37

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different organs and tissues can be donated, including vital ones like heart, kidneys, liver, pancreas and lungs to ailing patients.

However, when a brain dead patient is kept for autopsy for hours, his/her heart finally fails, after which only a few tissues like cornea, bone, skin and blood vessels can be transplanted.

"Focus is on brain dead because there is potentially a huge pool of such patients in the country given the increasing number of road accidents. They can meet the local demands of organs. Presently, there is a huge gap between demand and supply. A State-based network with a central network office would help the required boost in the country," a Health Ministry official said.

A central registry will be maintained wherein database of all death records, the first step in the list of procedure of organ donation and list of potential recipients in all the identified hospitals. Brain dead families will be encouraged to sign the mandatory form giving permission to harvest vital organs, as being done in Spain, the official maintained.

Spain has increased the number of deceased donors per

million people -- a commonly used benchmark -- from 14 in 1989 when the system was put in place to 34.2 last year, the highest rate in the world.

Coordinators will be appointed under the MOPDO to create awareness to lay stress on harvesting healthy organs from brain-dead patients, encourage the practice of organ donation after death by offering a number of incentives, and educate the poor on organ donation so that they don't fall prey to clandestine organ trade cartels.

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