“It is increasingly important to raise awareness of the need for more black and Asian donors.”

Religious Beliefs Can Impact Organ Donation

Elizabeth Lynch

A misunderstanding of religions’ views on organ donation has led to a shortage of organ donations from minorities, Elizabeth Lynch argues in the following viewpoint. According to Lynch, none of the major religions prohibit organ donation, although consultation with a spiritual leader might be required first. However, Lynch contends, minority ethnic populations may not be aware of these teachings, and therefore awareness needs to be raised to help alleviate the organ shortage. Lynch is a journalist who has written numerous articles for Nursing Standard and other medical publications.

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. How do Orthodox Christians view organ donation, according to Lynch?

2. According to the author, what Hindu niyama can be interpreted as supporting organ donation?

As stated by Lynch, what did the UK Muslim Law Council decide in 1996?

Every year hundreds of people die in the UK [United Kingdom] while waiting for an organ transplant. But the death toll would be reduced significantly if religious and cultural fears of organ donations were overcome.

The need for organ donation is high among minority ethnic groups. According to UK Transplant, a special health authority with a remit for matching and allocating donated organs, people of black and Asian origin are three to four times more likely to need a kidney transplant than the rest of the population. This is because those of south Asian and Afro-Caribbean origin are particularly susceptible to diabetes and high blood pressure, which often result in kidney and heart failure.

Reaching Ethnic Donors

For a transplant to be successful it is important that the blood group of the donor and recipient is matched. With kidney transplants, tissue type matching is also important. The closer the match the better and a close match is more likely if the individuals are from the same ethnic group—tissue types tend to be incompatible between ethnic groups.

Although the highest number of organ transplants—2,867—was recorded [in 2004], 443 people died while waiting. Of those, one in seven was from a minority ethnic group. Given the need for more organs to be donated, why is there this shortfall? Sue Sutherland, chief executive of UK Transplant, says; ‘The problem is that people in general, whatever their culture, do not talk about organ donation with their families. But because of cultural and language barriers, black and Asian communities are even harder to reach.

‘Many think their religion forbids organ donation, but none of the major religions in the UK objects to organ donation and transplantation.’

What Factors Impact Organ Donors and Recipients?

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