Living kidney donation: the importance of public education


Abstract: A sample of Malaysians in the Klang Valley indicating their decision on becoming unrelated living kidney donors was surveyed regarding huge amounts of financial incentives to be rewarded to them. From the 1310 respondents, 72.1% said “no” on becoming a living donor. The reason “I don’t think humans can live with only one kidney” scored the highest (35.6%), and from the 27.9% of the respondents who are willing to donate their organ with the right financial incentive, most of the respondents picked the reasons “I want to do something noble in life” (50%), and monetary reason scored the lowest (6.2%), indicating that financial incentive is not a major reason guiding individuals’ decision on becoming living donors. We suggest that the government should put priority at targeting public education to raise the understanding on the risk, safety and the quality of life of donation and transplantation, and improving the public trust on the donation and the surgical methods to carry out transplantation.

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Key words: financial incentives – living kidney donors – Malaysia – organ donation – public education

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Conflict of interest: The authors hereby declare no conflict of interest.

Accepted for publication 28 January 2014

There is a serious deficit in the supply of human organs for transplantation. In Malaysia, conventional methods aiming at increasing organ donation are bearing little effect. Policies based on the altruistic model have hardly been successful as donations from the deceased only came to 0.48 per million people (1). Such a low donation rate is definitely not helping Malaysia’s growing list of people who are waiting for organs. In fact, the waiting list for kidney transplants in Malaysia has almost tripled – from 5542 in 1999 to 15 489 in July 2012 (2). To put into perspective, Malaysia’s record in organ donation has been dismal. Only 1302 living kidney donations have been performed in the country between 1975 and 2011 (3, 4).

Understandably, the deficit in the supply of human organs for transplantation has prompted the government to explore various initiatives. For instance, the government introduced a policy on unrelated living organ donation in 2007 to address a shortage of organ donors (Article 6.2.3) (5). Malaysia strengthened this policy in 2011 by making the procedures more specific (6). Talks are already underway since 2013 to fine tune the policy to encourage organ donation through offering compensation to donors.