LOW ORGAN DONATION RATE IN MALAYSIA: A SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

Organ shortage is a major concern in many countries. The objective of this paper was to investigate the factors that contribute to the low quantity of organ donation in Malaysia. The 1311 respondents in this survey came from the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese and Indian). The survey was based on these components: the reason for not pledging to become a donor; the reason of refusing to become a donor; and whether non-fungible incentive would influence decision. The lack of information and trust were the factors that influenced the respondents to remain apathetic to organ donation. The results denote that people are unlikely to become a donor even if non-fungible incentive were provided to them. Thus, it is important for the government bodies to evaluate the programme and strategies of public education in relation to organ donation.

Keywords: Malaysia, organ donation, organ donation rate, organ shortage, public education

Introduction

World over, the demand for organs far outweigh supply and Malaysia has one of the lowest deceased organ donation rates (0.48 donations per million populations in 2010) in the world. A similar scenario can be seen in countries like Myanmar (0.02), Guatemala (0.52), Bulgaria (1.14) and Thailand (1.26) (1).

One of the suggestions to overcome the problem of organ shortfall is for countries to implement the opt-out consent policy (2, 3, 4). Countries that follow the opt-out consent policy such as Spain (34.13), Belgium (25.61), France (25.31) and Austria (20.72) (1) have all experienced better rates of organ donation. While it is important to consider the opt-out consent policy, there are other policies that attempt to encourage organ donation. The range include: introducing paired organ donation drive where families of both the deceased donor and living donor are rewarded; promoting altruistic approaches by advocating the values of good Samaritan advocacy; implementing appropriate educational programs for the public and hospital staff regarding the need and benefits of organ donation; and managing the financial payment for the donor (5).

Some studies in Malaysia suggest the possibility of religio-cultural factor as the main impediment to organ donation in Malaysia (6, 7), while others suggest low organ donation – especially among the post-secondary education group – as the result of the public lack of trust toward the medical system (8). In another study, there was a proposal that non-fungible incentives would positively influence the way people react to organ donation (9). To facilitate organ donation, Malaysia introduced the Human Tissue Act in 1974, followed by a National Transplantation Program in 1975. The first living kidney transplant was performed in Malaysia in 1975 and the first deceased donation follow suit two years later.

Much later in 2007, Malaysia strengthened its existing transplantation policy by introducing the National Organ, Tissue and Cell Transplantation Policy. More recently, in 2011, the Government came out with a guideline and procedures to embark on ‘unrelated living donation.’ The effort though has given little effect. Up to December 2011, there were only 1122 kidney transplantation involving living donors, while only 378 transplantation involving deceased donors were recorded as of 31 July 2012 (10).

This paper is an attempt to explain the reasons that impede Malaysians to become donors by broadening our analysis to cover Malaysia’s population on their willingness to become donor.
models in campaigns, organising talk shows or organising sports event to create organ awareness. Meritorious as these efforts may be, these events have not turned in the result. As such, public education efforts hosted by the authorities and relevant stakeholders should not be limited only to organizing events that are macro in nature, but also activities that touches individuals at the personal level. One among the effective ways is to target the family, as studies have indicated that targeting individual families can better increase the chance of individuals to pledge for organ donation (11, 12, 13). The authorities may also target families of chronic patients, such as family members of dialysis patients. Employing such a niche approach could well influence one’s decision to donate as family members of a chronic patients may be able to better relate to problems of organ failure. In fact, our preliminary research on this group has confirmed such claim; that is, the survey found that 80% respondents (family members of dialysis patients) were willing to be deceased donor while 35% of respondents had signed the organ donation pledge at the time the survey was conducted (14). Besides families of chronic patients, education on organ donation could also be meted out to care providers of chronic patients; medical staff and social workers who were closely associated with the patient.

Apart from the above, organising campaigns that appeal to the cultural, social and religious preferences of target communities could also increase organ donation pledges.

Effective public education could well complement possible policy decision to implement the “opt-out” rather than “opt-in” strategy that has proven to be successful in many advanced countries. Public education could also address issues relating to cultural-religio factors to allay fears on organ donation. Also more importantly, public education could well address Malaysia’s palpable number of deceased organ donations which could prove to be the best option at addressing organ shortage.

The potential for organ donation in Malaysian population is largely unexplored. The current study indicates that insufficient information on organ donation and lack of trust towards the medical system are the main causes to low organ donation rate in the country. Re-evaluation and improvement of the current national programme and policies on organ donation to facilitate effective public education are thus crucial to enhance public awareness and acceptance towards organ donation, so as to address the problem of organ shortage in Malaysia.

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References