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# Organs aren't commodities

Updated 6/25/2006 9:10 PM ET

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By **Charles B. Fruit**

Recently, a cartoon in a national magazine showed a middle-aged man standing behind a table on the sidewalk. Beneath the table was a large ice chest, and above it, hawking his wares, was a sign that read: "Lemonade and kidneys."

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Unfortunately, this cartoon looms as a cautionary tale. That is why the National Kidney Foundation opposes any market-based incentives that financially reward donors or their families who offer life-saving organs. Even on a trial basis, introducing money into such a fragile human decision-making process would set a dangerous precedent. Once we start down the road of treating organs like commodities, there's no turning back.

This view was underscored in a recent report by the Institute of Medicine. It emphasized that financial incentives — such as direct payments, funeral expenses or charitable contributions — shouldn't be used to increase donation rates. Such incentives could move people to view organs as commodities, diminish altruistic donations and lead to the potential exploitation of lower income individuals.

Payment stands as an affront to those families that have already donated organs of loved ones out of charity. There is evidence to suggest it might prove similarly offensive to future donors. In 2005, the National Survey of Organ Donation found that 10.8% of those polled would be less likely to grant consent for the organs of a deceased family member to be used for transplant if they were offered payment; 68% said they would be neither more nor less likely to grant consent. Thus, there is little data to show that financial incentives would increase donation rates.

Rather than rely on incentives, we favor practical new policies to increase organ donation. For example, by working to implement best practices, the Department of Health and Human Services has helped to produce a steady increase in donation rates over the past 10 years — most effectively by making the option of donation available to families with loved ones who've suffered cardiac death who would not previously have been considered potential donors. As a result, many hospitals now have donation rates of 75%. HHS has announced a goal of doubling transplantation in a decade.

With this type of breakthrough, it should not be necessary to experiment with radical marketplace proposals.

*Charles B. Fruit is chairman of the National Kidney Foundation.*

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