

Another View: Benefits, Rewards and Incentives for Organ Donation

The following is a *proposed* position statement prepared for TRIO by Thomas G Peters, M.D., F.A.C.S., F.A.S.N., member of TRIO's Board of Directors and Medical Advisor.

The number of patients awaiting solid organ transplantation in America has grown to 100,000 persons as of October, 2008. Unfortunately, the growth in both deceased and living organ donation has not increased: 8,089 deceased donors and 6,313 living donors for a total of 14,402 donors in 2007, a decrease from 14,755 in 2006. Sadly, organ donation in America has been static over the inclusive years 2004 to 2007. And, during that four year period, over 8,500 patients each year died waiting or became too sick to transplant. In fact, since 1995, over 100,000 patients have been removed from the waiting list because they were too ill, or because they died while waiting for a kidney, liver, heart, or other life saving organ.

Compelled by these rather stark facts, many thoughtful medical professionals, ethicists, legislators, and patients themselves are considering the role that benefits or financial incentives for organ donation may play in closing the gap between the need for saving lives and the current shortfall of organs for transplantation. The rationale for financial incentives is that organs are not available because consent is not given by families for organ recovery from deceased donors, or living donors do not or cannot volunteer.

There are distinctions between deceased donor and living donor rewards for donation. As to living organ donation, there is growing interest among many that living kidney donation would increase with realistic benefits offered to appropriately evaluated donors. Allowing incentives would save lives, could actually save American tax-payers considerable amounts of money, and could be designed so that practical considerations regarding compensation would be governed by strict oversight to eliminate black market practices. In terms of deceased donor rewards and incentives, the provision of a life insurance policy or death gratuity in conjunction with completed organ recovery is an idea which is consistent with a number of American death-related benefits including those from the Veterans Administration, the military, Social Security, and life insurance policies.

A number of proposals have addressed such matters so that both living and deceased organ donation might be increased. These have ranged from family tax credits to funeral payments to a cash survivor benefit. Ideas such as lifetime health insurance for a living kidney donor are not only realistic but also make sense. In all proposals, firm definitions and regulatory oversight must be an important consideration written into law by the United States Congress.

In the last several years, a number of organizations have come to the conclusion that rewards and incentives for organ donation should be studied to assure that such efforts would, indeed, increase donation. Supporting such studies

are the American Medical Association, the United Network for Organ Sharing, the American Association of Kidney Patients, the American Society of Transplant Surgeons, American Society of Transplantation and others. A bill may soon come out of the United States Senate amending the National Organ Transplant Act to increase penalties for purchase or sale of organs, while clarifying government regulated rewards or incentives for both living and deceased organ donation.

The concept that incentives, benefits, or gratuities should recognize an important life saving contribution such as organ donation to fellow Americans is one which seems just and proper, especially if the concept is studied in real-time trials to assure that it would save those 8,000 or more lives now lost each year. A compassionately offered but highly regulated set of benefits might be studied from state-to-state or among selected organ procurement organizations. Certainly, understanding the true effect of such a proposal is an important step in knowing whether or not such ideas might work.

The Transplant Recipients International Organization, Inc., supports the concept that rewards for organ donation must be studied in America.

TRIO Members Are Urged to Make Their Voices Heard!

TRIO President of the Board of Directors, J.T. Rhodes has emailed TRIO Chapter Presidents, asking that they inform their members of the opportunity to take action on agreeing or disagreeing with the above potential position statement on the issue of financial incentives for organ donation. In an email to Chapter Presidents, on October 8, J.T. said "Please encourage your members to make their voices heard on this issue by posting their comments on www.trioweb.org on the bulletin board."

TRIO members should post their thoughts on this issue by November 15, 2008. If preferred, members may email their comments and concerns to J.T. Rhodes at jtrhodescpa@msn.com, with the Subject Line: **TRIO Comment.**

**100,089
waiting list candidates
as of October 9, 2008**

-- UNOS (www.unos.org)