New draft guidelines on organ transplantation open for public consultation

A new guideline to inform tough decisions around the allocation of organs for transplantation has today been released for public consultation.

The draft document, *Ethical guidelines for organ transplantation from deceased donors*, was developed with advice from an expert working group and released by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Australia has one of the highest organ transplantation success rates in the world, but around 1,500 Australians are awaiting a transplant at any one time, a number of whom die before an organ becomes available.

NHMRC CEO Professor Anderson said that because the demand for organs greatly outstrips their availability, it is important that decisions around who is eligible for organ transplantation and how to prioritise recipients are made in ethical and transparent ways.

"Deciding how to allocate organs for transplantation is a very complex process and raises a number of ethical issues and dilemmas. There are many ways to determine why one person should receive an organ over another, rather than just one 'right' way," Professor Anderson said.

"Once finalised, these guidelines will provide an overarching framework to help decision-makers with the tough calls in ethically robust ways," he said.

In determining whether a person is eligible to receive a donated organ, the guidelines state that there must be no discrimination against potential recipients on medically irrelevant grounds.

Factors that should be considered include: potential benefit to the individual, length of time awaiting a transplant, the urgency of the need for a transplant and the likelihood that the recipient will be able to adhere to the necessary post-operative treatment and health advice.

The guidelines also cover the importance of discussing transplantation with potential recipients well before an organ becomes available, consent and the need to respect choices of potential recipients to refuse the offer of an organ.

Through a series of case studies, the guidelines tease out some of these ethical quandaries and show how the principles can be used to shape decisions.

The guidelines were developed at the request of the Organ and Tissue Authority and Transplantation Society of Australia and New Zealand (TSANZ). Once finalised, they will inform the next version of the...
organ-specific clinical protocols for organ transplantation from deceased donors, which will be developed by the TSANZ.

Professor Anderson said public consultation was a crucial part of the process in implementing the guidelines.

“More than 1000 Australians underwent organ transplantation in 2013 so it is important that the public is satisfied with the values and principles that guide how decisions around allocation are made,” Professor Anderson said.

Public consultation on the draft Ethical guidelines for organ transplantation from deceased donors closes on 6 March at 5:00pm AEDT. To make a submission, visit the NHMRC Public Consultations website.

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