

Attitudes and Awareness toward Organ Donation among Clinic Attendees in Trinidad and Tobago

The Editor,

Sir,

The shortage of donated organs is a major limitation for transplant programmes worldwide with only 35–50% of suitable individuals donating their solid organs after death (1–3). Currently in Trinidad and Tobago, approximately 500 nationals are in need of renal transplants and this number increases by about 40 every year (4). This study was conducted to examine attitudes and awareness toward organ donation in the country and to obtain information for a national awareness campaign.

A prospective, cross-sectional study using a convenience sample of clinic attendees from seven health centres in the North Central Region of Trinidad and Tobago was performed. A standard questionnaire, based on previously published questionnaires and pretested against friends and family, was administered. Respondents were classified by age, gender, ethnicity and their knowledge of organ donation was assessed. Data were analysed using the Chi-square test on the SPSS v 16 programme. A *p*-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of The University of the West Indies, St Augustine.

Out of 621 clinic attendees selected, 601 participated, giving a response rate of 97.7%. Respondents were 31.6% male and 68.4% female and 79.7% knew the term 'organ donation'. The principal source of information was the television (72.9%). Information was also obtained from the newspaper (27.3%), friends (18.1%) and family (18.1%). There was a significant correlation between education and awareness of organ donation (*p* = 0.00), but no correlation with the other demographic variables (age *p* = 0.60, gender *p* = 0.64 and ethnicity *p* = 0.43). As many as 67.4% were in favour of organ donation and would be willing to donate organs if they qualified. The main deterrent to donation was a fear of disfigurement or mutilation (16.5%). This was followed by religious beliefs (8.5%) and fear of misuse of the donated organs (2.5%); 39.5% of respondents did not indicate a reason.

Willingness of the Trinidad and Tobago population to donate (67.4%) compared favourably to the population in the

United States of America (5), where according to Donate Life America, an online survey of 5100 adults conducted during January 2010 showed that 43% of people were still undecided, reluctant or did not want their organs or tissues donated after their death. In Trinidad and Tobago, fear of disfigurement or mutilation was the main deterrent to donation. A national awareness programme should specifically describe the process of organ donation, reassure against fears of disfigurement or that the organs would be wasted or mis-treated and provide examples of ethical and successful organ transplantation. To convert willingness to actual donation, the television should continue to be utilized, but emphasis should also be placed on other media such as newspapers, radio, the internet and social networks.

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