

# A Gift for Life, World Donation Day

**G**ENEVA, Switzerland—A roundtable discussion organized under the auspices of the 7th European and 1st World Organ Donation and Transplantation Day has provided a global perspective on the issues and ethics of organ donation.

Professor Philippe Morel and his team from the University of Geneva organized the one of a kind gathering. The event hosted discussions on a range of issues including the potential impact of the dramatic growth of the commercial organ market.

Alex Capron, Director of Ethics, Trade, Human Rights and Health Law for WHO, said “as early as 1970, The Transplantation Society (TTS) has affirmed that the sale of organs is indefensible under any circumstances.” The Society maintains it is the obligation of transplant programs to ensure that donors have not been solicited and are not acting for profit.

In 1989, the World Health

The guiding principles establish, as universal ethical standards, that:

- all donations should be knowing and voluntary;
- organs should be distributed equitably;
- organs should preferably come from deceased donors;
- among living donors, related donors are preferred;
- no payment should be given or received for organs.

In May 2004, the WHA reviewed the guiding principles to ensure they more clearly addressed, among other concerns, the safety of the living donor. The principles were updated to consider special cultural factors such as attitudes towards cadaveric donations.

Adib Rizvi, Director of the Sindh Institute for Urology and Transplantation (SIUT) in Karachi, Pakistan, said that in some cultures there remains a resistance to organ donation after death. Rizvi said legislation has been delayed in Pakistan’s Senate for 12 years. In Pakistan, one of the few Muslim countries without a brain-death law, societal reverence for the dead, low literacy rates and other factors combine to

encourage government inaction. The absence of an appropriate legal framework has resulted in a dramatic increase in ‘unrelated commercial transplantation.’ In 1990 ‘unrelated commercial transplantation’ was 25 percent of all transplantations done in Pakistan. By 2004, in the absence of a



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legislative framework, it had grown to 84 percent of all transplantations, making Pakistan a center of transplant tourism.

Frank Delmonico, Chairman of the Ethics Committee of TTS called for global guidance for the welfare of living donors. He said experts and leaders in transplantation from more than 40 countries attending the Amsterdam and Vancouver Forums had developed an international reference of guidelines focused on the living donor.

Rafael Galindez, the Senior Executive of Argentina’s National Organization for Transplantation said the access to safe, effective and ethical transplantation requires the collaboration of all stakeholders, professionals, health authorities and the public. He said Argentina’s new National Information System for Procurement and Transplantation allows for regulatory analysis, surveillance and monitoring and provides transparency to procurement and transplantation activity.

In Japan Shiho Takaoka, Chief of the Office for Organ Transplantation in Japan’s Ministry of Health, said the brain-death definition for potential donors only became law in 1997. Previous to that time, all donors were defined by heart deaths. He said that since introduction of the law, acceptance of the brain-death definition has resulted in very few additional transplants and that efforts are underway through public information programs and other means to improve the level of donations. ☺



(From left to right) Luc Noël, WHO, Kathryn Wood, President, TTS, and Frank Delmonico, Chairman, TTS Ethics Committee attended A Gift for Life in Geneva.

Assembly adopted resolution WHA 42.5 entitled “Preventing the Purchase and Sale of Human Organs.” Four years later, the WHA approved “Guiding Principles on Human Organ Transplantation” which resulted in legislation in support of high ethical standards in more than 60 countries.