Dr. Saad Al Shohaib, National Guard, King Khalid Hospital, PO Box 9515 Jeddah 21423 (Saudi Arabia)

Dear Sir,

Selling organs is prohibited in most countries and if it happens it is illegal. Patients and medical personnel who do this argue that these patients need a transplant and help should be given in obtaining the organ, particularly when the supply is limited. However, our experience is different. We have 8 patients who, against our advice, have travelled to India over the last few years and have received a nonrelated kidney transplant there.

The outcome of these patients is as follows: (1) 1 patient died on the table in the operating room (33-year-old female, mother of 9 children); (2) 1 patient died 1 week post-operatively; the cause of death was not clear to us (this information was received from his family); (3) 1 patient died with HIV infection 2 years posttransplant; (4) 1 patient had chronic active hepatitis due to hepatitis C with a functioning graft; (5) 1 patient was transplanted twice and lost his graft due to poor compliance. This particular patient was given a medical report indicating that transplant was contraindicated. After the second transplant he had pulmonary tuberculosis and died due to intracerebral bleed related mainly to poor compliance with his antihypertensive medications. This patient had a communication problem because he was aphasic following a stroke 1 year prior to his first transplantation; (6) 1 patient lost his graft due to chronic rejection 5 years post-transplant and is now on chronic hemodialysis. His course was complicated by a debilitating CMV infection which responded well to gancyclovir; (7) 2 patients have had functioning grafts for the last 3 years and are in a good condition.

We believe that organ trading is both ethically and medically wrong resulting in disastrous complications for the patient. In fact, there is no separation between ethical and medical mistakes. We believe that ethical mistakes lead to serious medical problems. Professional medical practice always needs a strong ethical background.

In our series the high complication rate could be mainly attributed to ethical mistakes. Organ trading is associated with an unacceptably high rate of medical complications and efforts should be made to abolish this practice. It is much safer for a patient to continue on dialysis rather than to get a transplant in this way.

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