

## ORGAN DONATION AND TISSUE TRANSPLANTATION

The first successful kidney transplant took place in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1954. Since that time, transplantation, including kidneys, hearts, livers and lungs, has become an important medical treatment. In the past two decades, medical breakthroughs have allowed for a larger number of organ transplants and have increased survival rates for transplant recipients.<sup>1</sup>

Transplantation in Canada is growing. Over the past decade, organ transplants have increased by 44 per cent in Canada. On the top of the list of single organ transplants in Canada are kidneys (62%), livers (22%) and hearts (10%). Men make up the majority (64%) of those requiring transplants, particularly heart transplants. Eighty six per cent of transplant recipients are between 18 and 64 years of age. In December 1998, there were 3,434 patients waiting for an organ transplant in Canada.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the need for transplants continues to exceed the supply of organs and Canada's organ donation rate is unacceptably low.

CNA believes that a national comprehensive integrated approach is needed to improve organ donor rates in Canada. In 1999, CNA made the following recommendations to The House of Commons Standing Committee on Health deliberation on State of Organ Donation and Tissue Transplantation:

1. Increase education of health professionals to ensure that they have a good knowledge and understanding of:
  - The benefits of organ transplantation and the suitability of organs for donation or referral;
  - The processes to be followed within the particular institution;
  - Techniques to manage the sensitivities, cultural, religious and ethical components of communicating with and encouraging family members to consider organ donation; and,
  - The professional's role in enhancing public awareness of this issue.
2. Develop a national collaborative approach including a national registry, to enhance the effectiveness, equitability and efficient handling of organ donation and tissue transplantation across Canada; and,
3. Increase public awareness and understanding through consistent messaging about the importance and benefits of organ transplantation.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Health<sup>3</sup> recommended the establishment of a Canadian Transplant Network to replace the current regionalized approach – this is an important step toward achieving a national program. The report identifies the development of ongoing public and professional awareness and education strategies as an integral role for the Canadian Transplant Network. The report acknowledges that families of donors are true heroes who deserve recognition, education and involvement in the donation process.

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Nurses have an ethical responsibility to “respect and promote the autonomy of clients and help them to express their health needs and values, and to obtain appropriate information and services.”<sup>4</sup> Nurses are client advocates and must ensure that clients and families receive information and support services to allow for responsible decision-making and follow through with organ and tissue donation, retrieval and transplantation. Open communication will lead to a clear understanding of the perspectives of all involved.

Nurses can support organ donation and tissue transplantation through:

- Collaboration with and support of the other members of the transplant team, including the client/family, during the donation, retrieval and transplantation phases;
- Acknowledgement and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the different members of the health care team, volunteer agencies and organ procurement services;
- Encouragement of health care facilities to provide support programs for clients, family members, and health care providers in transplantation services;
- Knowledge about agency policies and procedures regarding organ and tissue transplantation and develop inter disciplinary policies and procedures to direct the team in the transplantation process;
- An awareness of policies related to legal and ethical issues such as consent and confidentiality; and,
- Understanding the cost-benefit aspects of organ and tissue transplantation.

Lifestyle practices that have an impact on transplantation must be addressed. CNA encourages nurses to develop health promotion and illness prevention programs to reduce the need for organ and tissue transplantation, and to support health promotion activities that decrease untimely deaths due to accidents.

There are many ethical issues inherent in discussions around organ donation and tissue transplantation. Serious attention must be given to dealing with ethical dilemmas arising from beliefs, values and attitudes.

Emerging ethical issues are increasingly complex. In recent years, for example, xenotransplantation<sup>5</sup> has received renewed attention as a therapeutic option. The biological, social and ethical issues raised by xenotransplantation are profound. They include difficult questions about personal autonomy, resource allocation, public safety, industry regulation and global health. At the same time, scientists are exploring cloning as a means of producing organs for transplant. Given the scientific and ethical uncertainty surrounding these emerging technologies, it is important for the nursing profession to participate in future developments.

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**Also see:**

CNA Position Statement: *End-of-Life Issues* (2000)

CNA Fact Sheet: *Palliative Care* (2000)

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*Joint Statement on Advance Directives* (CNA, Canadian Healthcare Association, Canadian Homecare Association, Canadian Public Health Association, Home Support Canada, Canadian Long-Term Care Association and developed in collaboration with the Canadian Bar Association, 1994)

*Joint Statement on Resuscitative Interventions* (CNA, Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Healthcare Association, Catholic Health Association of Canada, and developed in collaboration with the Canadian Bar Association, 1995)

*Joint Statement on Preventing and Resolving Ethical Conflicts Involving Health Care Providers and Persons Receiving Care* (CNA, Canadian Medical Association, Canadian Healthcare Association, Catholic Health Association of Canada, 1999).

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#### References:

- <sup>1</sup> United Network for Organ Sharing. (1997). *Critical Data: Milestones*. Richmond, VA: Author.
- <sup>2</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. (1999). *Canadian Organ Replacement Register: Transplant Statistics*. Ottawa: Author.
- <sup>3</sup> Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Standing Committee on Health. Organ and tissue donations and transplantations: a Canadian approach: Report of the Standing Committee on Health. Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1999. (WO 660 C353 1999)
- <sup>4</sup> The *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (1997) provides guidance for decision-making concerning ethical issues and a basis for self-evaluation and peer review regarding nursing practice.
- <sup>5</sup> *Xenotransplantation* is the adoption of animal organs for transplantation into human beings.