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## **This is what happened in Spain's first 'crossover' transplant**

[For diagram see original article]

### **Altruistic donor**

The chain started with the kidney donation from a 'good Samaritan' going to a recipient in a couple.

The wife of the first recipient donated her kidney to a sick person in a second couple.

The wife of the second recipient donated her kidney to a third patient on the waiting list.

### **On the waiting list**

The final recipient, selected using medical criteria, was on the waiting list to receive a kidney from a deceased donor for three years.

## **Spain, France and Italy are to exchange organs for donation chains**

► The creation of this type of 'common area' in southern Europe will increase the chances of finding a donor match

### **CRISTINA GARRIDO**

**BRUSSELS** | Stronger together. Although there are many things on which we find it difficult to agree, this time the strategy was clear. Spain, France and Italy have signed the Southern Europe Transplant Alliance to promote their successful donation and transplant system – which is public, coordinated and directly answerable to the Ministries of Health, as compared to the private models of central and northern Europe – to the international bodies. 'We (Spain, France and Italy) decided that we had to do something together because we have similar philosophies, ethical criteria and structures and we could not each go our own way given how things are in the northern countries', explained Dr Rafael Matesanz, Director of the Spanish National Transplant Organisation, at the seminar on donations and transplants organised by the European Commission in Brussels yesterday.

### **Spain sets the trend**

**In Spain, 21 crossover transplantations have already been performed, 11 in Italy and none in France as yet.**



**Medical teams arrive at Badajoz airport with an organ for transplantation**

For Karim Laouabdia, Dr Matesanz' counterpart in France, it was a natural alliance. 'We have always had good relations and the aim is to strengthen this collaboration and take it further', the Director of the French Biomedicine Agency told ABC. He believes that this alliance will serve to 'share experiences, develop common strategies, exchange organs for specific groups of patients and adopt a common position on key issues regarding organ, tissue and cell donation'.

If we look at the statistics, there is no doubt as to the success of the Spanish model. For twenty years, Spain has ranked top in the world for donations and transplants. In 2011, we again broke the world record with 35 donors per million people, which is double the European average (19 donors) and more than nine donors higher than the US average (26 donors) according to the World Transplant Registry. Countries such as Portugal, France, Italy and the United Kingdom have been inspired by the Spanish system and have created national agencies that are directly answerable to their Ministries of Health in order to coordinate organ donation and transplants. 'Italy, Spain and France account for almost 50% of all transplants in Europe, which is important not only for our countries but for all of Europe', states Alessandro Nanni Costa, Director of the Italian National Transplant Centre.

According to Dr Matesanz, the alliance not only plays a strategic role in Europe but also presents significant 'advantages' for donors and recipients in the three countries, which have a total population of '170 million people, and account for 48% of donations and 43% of transplants in Europe'. On a proposal from Spain, the Southern Transplant Alliance will 'share' the couples participating in their crossover kidney transplantation programmes so as to increase the possibility of finding compatible donors. Since the programme was launched in 2009, 163 couples in Spain have signed up and 21 transplantations have been performed. In Italy there have been 11 transplantations and in France they are still working on it. As well as working together to promote organ donation, the exchange of organs in emergency situations will also be encouraged, and France and Italy will be given priority in receiving remaining organs. The alliance, the first of its kind, is not averse to new members, and Portugal and Malta may be the next countries to join.

*Two models head to head in Europe*

In contrast to the Spanish-French-Italian model, the rest of Europe currently favours private management. There are as many as 40 bone-marrow donor registries in Germany, one of which, DKMS, recently and somewhat controversially wanted to start operating in Spain. Germany has a private organ transplantation foundation, the DSO, whose donor figures (14.7 donors per million people) are still well below those of Spain.

In order to distribute the organs, the Germans use Eurotransplant, a foundation which is run in a similar way and which Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Austria and Croatia are a part of. The Scandinavian countries have a similar system, Scandiatransplant, whose members are Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland. Although Sweden has tried to adopt a system similar to Spain's, 'excessive decentralisation of its authorities makes this very complicated', pointed out Dr Matesanz.