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TOTAL OF 135 MILLION POTENTIAL DONORS

Hungary joins Eurotransplant

European cooperation on exchange of organs for transplant is expanding. Greater chance of finding suitable organs.

FROM OUR EDITOR
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BRUSSELS | Tomorrow, Hungary will be the eighth country to join Eurotransplant, the international organisation for organ donations, lining up alongside Belgium, Germany, Croatia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria and Slovenia.

Eurotransplant is a collaborative association comprising dozens of transplant centres, hospitals where organs are removed but no transplants carried out, and tissue-typing laboratories which find the best match for people on the waiting list. The organisation ensures that the available organs are given to the most suitable recipient - if necessary across national borders.

Tomorrow's starting date is only important on paper. In practice, Hungary has already been having a trial period within Eurotransplant for almost a year now. In February this year, surgeons at the Gottsegen György Cardiological Centre in Budapest performed a cardiac transplant on a 9-year-old boy using a heart from another Member State.

7 000 organs a year for a waiting list of 16 000 patients

Hungary only carries out transplants of the heart, kidneys, liver and pancreas (Belgium transplants hearts, lungs, livers, kidneys, the pancreas and the small intestine). For lung transplants, Hungary collaborates with transplant doctors in Vienna.

The arrival of Hungary means that almost 135 million people will be able to donate their organs to each other. This is at least the theory, but in practice not everyone is automatically a donor in all the Member States. Only Belgium, Austria, Luxembourg and Slovenia operate an opting-out system where all residents are donors unless they specifically object. The other countries, including Hungary, have an opting-in system where individuals must expressly volunteer to be donors and/or doctors must ask a deceased person's family for permission to remove organs.

These differences can be seen in the donor figures: Hungary has only 14 donors per million residents, compared with 25 in Belgium.

Each year, Eurotransplant organises the distribution of around 7 000 donor organs from deceased persons. Organ donation from live donors is outside Eurotransplant's remit. The central waiting list contains around 16 000 patients, and every year people are dying because they do not receive an organ in time.