

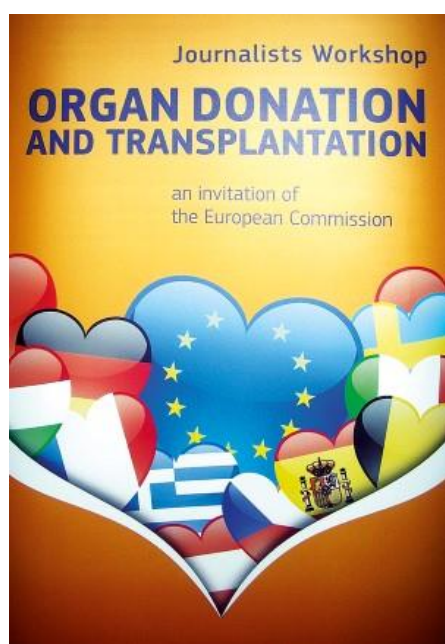
## Transplantation and communication

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### Problems faced by transplant patients

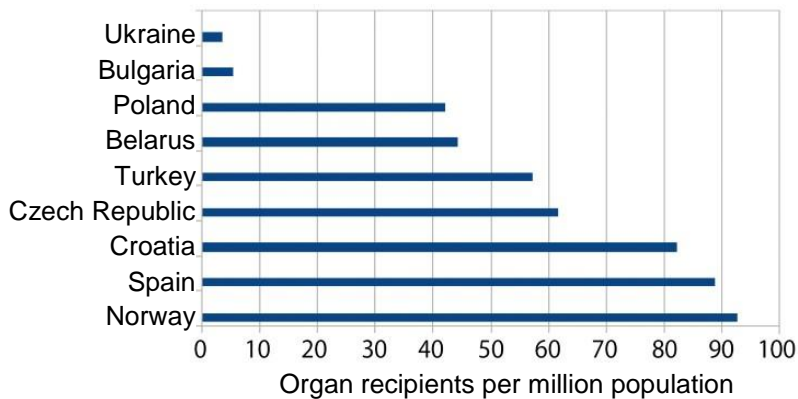
#### Marta Florea

The fifth annual journalists' workshop on organ donation and transplantation was held in Brussels in November 2014. The event was organised by the European Commission and specifically the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety. The workshop participants had an opportunity to acquaint themselves with the latest developments in transplantation in different Member States of the European Union and in selected non-EU countries.

#### Poland lags behind

The number of organ transplant recipients per million population is a measure that helps better illustrate the complexity of the transplantation problem in Europe. These figures were the following: 92.8 in Norway, 88.8 in Spain, 82.3 in Croatia, 61.8 in the Czech Republic,

57.3 in Turkey, 44.3 in Belarus, 42.1 in Poland, 5.4 in Bulgaria and 3.4 in Ukraine. This is illustrated by the graph.



It can be seen that the high number of organ transplants is not always correlated with the country's GDP, location or geopolitical settings. Both the lecturers and the participants probed the question of what factors influenced the number of transplants performed in a given country: EU directives, the way health services are organised, the media or perhaps something else?

### **Background and prospects**

Helene Le Borgne discussed the European Commission's actions in the field of transplantation. Doctor Axel Rahmel familiarised the journalists with the issues concerning the coordination of organ donation and transplantation. Juliette van der Laan talked about the operations of Eurotransplant and the issue of cross-border organ donation.

Katharine Wright, UK, gave a lecture on ethical issues, which pose a particularly complex challenge in the field of transplantology. Professor Jacques Pirenne, Leuven University Clinic, addressed new opportunities and innovations in organ transplantation. Stefaan Van der Spiegel, European Commission, talked about the costs and advantages of organ transplantation.

All presentations are available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/blood\\_tissues\\_organ/events/journalist\\_workshops\\_organ\\_en.htm#fragment0](http://ec.europa.eu/health/blood_tissues_organ/events/journalist_workshops_organ_en.htm#fragment0).

### **Common problems**

Discussions after presentations and informal conversations led to a conclusion that organ transplantation faced similar problems in many countries. A common pattern was established: blown up by the media, scandals associated with organ transplants inevitably led to a decrease in donations. This was true not only in Poland but also in the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy. The trust of patients, donors, their families and the society at large can easily be undermined with a single incompetent presentation (particularly if it is aired on television). And it takes years to rebuild it and thereby achieve an increase in donations.

Doctor Rafael Matesanz presented a multiannual campaign launched in Spain to increase the number of transplantations. Thanks to this campaign, Spain became a leader both in Europe and worldwide in number of transplanted organs.

The myth of a risk-taking motorcyclist as an excellent organ donor was another misconception widespread in Europe. Most of the victims of road accidents cannot be donors because of the multiple organ damage they suffer.

84 % of donors do not die from traumatic causes and the most frequent cause of death is intracranial haemorrhage. However, there has been a significant drop in the number of such donors due to the decreasing mortality rates among cerebral stroke patients.

### Specific cases

The participants were particularly moved by the testimonies of persons whose life had changed as a result of transplantation and those who had changed other people's lives because of their decision to donate organs.

Regina Hennelly, an Irish journalist, talked about her difficult journey from an incidental diagnosis of renal insufficiency through a tiring dialysis treatment to kidney transplantation and her new life afterwards.

[Sofia, from Portugal], shared her joy of being able to donate a kidney to her brother and talked about the process of organ removal from a living donor.

Lia van Kempen, a Belgian mother whose young daughter had died after falling from the stairs, talked about her decision to donate her child's organs.

