

European Day for Organ Donation: 10 Europeans die every day due to lack of graft

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"When I entered the operating room to give one of my two kidneys to my brother I did not flinch. I had a daughter and a husband waiting for me although in Italy, but my brother had three children in Portugal that were expecting a miracle for their father. Today I have a lovely scar on my body. My brother lives and works completely normal. And if you ask me, I do not consider myself a hero. I am just glad that a part of my body lives inside him ..."

A few words about a great miracle which, like **Sofia Ciravegna**, hundreds of people experience throughout Europe, either through the love of their family, either through altruism of some unknowns who despite the pain from the loss of their loved ones find the courage to say "yes" to organ donation, creating life through death.

In a Europe of 28, of course, like many other things, raising awareness around the issue of organ donation does not follow "one speed". Fortunately however, things follow a path forward, with the statistics showing that in 2012 the total number of transplants touched for the first time 30.731, while cadaveric donors totalled 9.534.

It is moreover notable that in the last year 19.084 people received a kidney graft (were 18.712 in 2011) and other 6.968 received a liver (were 7.006 in 2011). Correspondingly, heart transplantation was performed in 2.004 individuals, lung in 1.810 individuals, pancreas in 830 and small bowel in 35 patients.

These statistics, however, although promising, are but only one side of the coin, as at the same time experts are sounding the "alarm" indicating the existence of another kind of statistical measurement, that of the death of patients on waiting lists for a salutary graft.

The **15th European Day for Organ Donation**, therefore, for people in the European Commission is beyond an anniversary also an opportunity: to disprove any myths surrounding the issue of donating organs, tissues and cells, to inform people about the work done today in political and scientific level and ultimately attain to close the "gap" between the percentage of those who in the

polls indicate are well versed towards transplants and the percentage of those that eventually become donors.

"Organ donation, both from living and deceased, is not just an altruistic act, but also can improve or even save lives", said European Commissioner for Health, Tonio Borg welcoming the 4th Journalists Meeting on "Organ Donation and transplantation", which took place a few days ago in Brussels. And he underlined: "The human being must be the center point of all our actions. Transplantation is not commerce."

At the same time however, as the language of numbers says that every human has three times more likelihood to be a transplant recipient, instead of a donor, it makes you wonder whether Europeans have become conscious of the need to promote the idea of organ donation.

According to official EU data, the best "performance" in the last year in terms of deceased donors was Spain (36,6 per million population), followed by Croatia (34,8) Belgium (29,5) and Malta (28,6). Greece stood at 6,9 per million population and the last in the ranking are: Bulgaria, Romania and Cyprus.

Respectively, with regard to living kidney donors according to the European information platform in the first place ranked the Netherlands (29 per million population), followed by Cyprus (27,9) and third place comes Sweden (16,4) and the United Kingdom (16,3). Relatively low, is Greece (4), while the latter come: Slovakia, Bulgaria and Poland.

The importance of the approach

So then the "bet" is that the rapid progress of science, which has improved medications and techniques, should run a parallel course with the advancement of public attitudes toward organ donation, an idea which the Council of Europe "elaborates" already from 1987.

Are there means to achieve this? The answer is given by Mr. Luc Colenbie, transplant coordinator in Belgium, noting that "the manner and time the doctor will approach the family is a key factor in whether they will accept or not to proceed with donation. Beyond that, however, what must everyone understand is that no one goes to the hospital as a donor? He goes as a patient. And we doctors do everything humanly possible to save them."

The approach, however, appears to be the one link in this chain. Because the other rather belongs to the already existing beliefs of people who will be invited to take the crucial decision, which may be based on religious reasons, previous experiences, etc.

According to Eurobarometer data, to the question "Have you ever discussed the donation with your family" only 32% of Greek respondents answered positively, while the EU average is also only 8 points higher (40%).

Equally disappointing is the fact that 86% of Greeks totally ignore the existing legislation on organ donation (72% in the EU), but despite all this 43% declares that they would like to be a donor after their death (55% in EU).

Interesting are also the replies about whether to donate the organs of another person in the family, where 41% answered positively (53% in the EU), but also the reasons why they might deny (31% fear, 45% lack of confidence in the "system" and 10% religion).

What the European Commission does

The Commission in an attempt both to increase the number of available grafts and to ensure their quality and also to achieve greater efficiency and access to procedures, has taken a series of legislative - and non - actions. In fact currently (2009-2015) an action plan is "running" , while others [related projects] have been created, among them the Plan «Train the trainers in transplant donor coordination», 2011 , the action ACCORD (2012-2015) and a program supporting the promotion of cross-border exchanges of organs, the FOEDUS with an horizon to 2016.

More details about this year's Day of Organ Donation [here](#)
(4 CoE videos on EODD)

What the numbers say

Overall, more than 63,800 patients were on the waiting list for receiving a transplant on 31.12.2012 in the EU (and respectively on 31.12.2011 were 61,500 people). Of those:

- more than 50,000 were listed for kidney
- more than 6,800 were expecting for liver
- about 3,400 were waiting for cardiac graft
- about 2,000 people were expecting for lungs
- approximately 1,400 patients were listed for pancreas

From them, the total number of patients who died while expecting to be transplanted was 3.780. In other words, about 10 people each day will lose their battle with life while expecting to find the salvation through a transplant. Is it not time to reflect upon the words of John Alliston, namely that "The only thing you take with you when you're gone is what you leave behind"?