

Who gets organ transplants? Who decides?

"Deciding who does or does not have an organ transplant can no longer be left exclusively to physicians and other health-care personnel," said Arthur L. Caplan, an authority on ethical issues in organ transplantation.

In an address Thursday at the University of Michigan, Caplan said:

"Legislators, bureaucrats, legal experts, public policy makers and, most importantly, the public itself should have a say in the complicated issues and the decisions in organ transplantation."

"The public is concerned that serious unfairness exists in the distribution of organs," Caplan said.

Caplan is an associate director of the Hastings Center in Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y., a non-profit research institute that studies ethical problems in science and health care.

"CHARGES OF bias and discrimination can haunt medical centers, even if the charges are untrue. We must do something to change that perception. Organ transplantation is suffering from a serious public relations problem."

This was the first of a series of public lectures to be sponsored by the Ethics and Social Impact Committee of the newly organized Transplant Policy Center, based at the U-M Medical Center.

The Transplant Policy Center, a statewide organization, was established last spring by a grant from the Michigan Department of Social Services to study and collect information on how organ transplantation affects individuals, their families and society, and other subjects important to formulating public policy.

THE PUBLIC relations problem facing organ transplantation was dramatized by the "Baby Jesse" case at Loma Linda Medical Center in California.

"Jesse" was at first denied a heart transplant, apparently because the transplant team believed there was little chance that the baby would receive proper support from parents, who were not married.

Lobbying by Baby Jesse's family and a Right-to-Life group and the use of the popular Phil Donahue television show as a forum persuaded the medical center to change its stand.

It was later revealed that another infant with the same medical problem, "Baby Calvin," in Pennsylvania, had been waiting for a donor

heart two weeks longer. Though a donor heart was eventually found for Baby Calvin, the entire incident raised questions about current methods of donor organ allocation, Caplan said.

IN THE UNITED States today, people can make a gift of their organs after their death. "I think we should turn up the heat a little," Caplan said.

France and some other European countries have made organ donation after death mandatory by law.

Caplan does not believe making organ donation mandatory will work, however, without the consent of family members as part of the process. He advocates required-request legislation, which has been passed in 27 states, including a Michigan law that will go into effect Oct. 6.

"Required request means that when someone dies, a professional with appropriate training must approach family members with a formal request for organ donation," Caplan said. "Currently, family members are frequently not approached with such requests."

Since the law was passed in Oregon, cornea donations there have increased 1,500 percent. In California, New York and Alabama, all of which have required-request laws, organ donations have increased substantially.

"As far as I'm concerned, that sticker on the back of the Michigan driver's license does little good at all. No one looks for your driver's license when you die."

PRESSING QUESTIONS of who is eligible for an organ transplant arise:

• Should money provided by American taxpayers pay for organs going to aliens or foreigners? Caplan favors an "Americans-first" policy.

• "Unfortunately," Caplan said, "transplantation has been used as a foreign policy tool more than once, placing Arab sheiks and Israeli VIPs as recipients ahead of Americans."

• "Is an alcoholic entitled to an organ transplant?"

• "Is ability to pay a consideration?"

• "What about the question of age? Should a person be denied a transplant because he or she is too old?" Caplan believes age alone is irrelevant, and that prognosis is the important issue.

Patients demand too much medicine

Americans are placing too many demands on their doctors because they expect the physicians to "keep me alive and keep me happy," says Dr. Marshall Goldberg, professor of medicine at Michigan State University.

Thirty years ago, the unwritten patient-doctor contract merely said, "Here's my money, keep me alive," Goldberg said. But the introduction of anti-anxiety and anti-depressant drugs has altered this professional relationship.

"It's a tough contract to fulfill," Goldberg said in a TV Guide magazine article. The author of several medical novels, he is chief of endocrinology of Hurley Medical Center, Flint.

GOLDBERG SAID there have been major changes in health-care institutions, and many hospitals are aggressive in their advertising.

"If the best way to lower the cost of a product or service is through competition, let there be competition. But because of the pressures hospital administrators are under to keep beds filled, there are few Mother Teresa types among them," he wrote.

Most physicians will admit, Goldberg said, that they spend less time with patients than before. But doctors point out that because of medical advances, they can do so much more for patients, and they bear a heavier responsibility.

New state road maps are ready

Michigan's new Official Transportation Map is making its debut as part of the state's 150th birthday celebration.

The map is one of the Michigan Department of Transportation's projects for the state Sesquicentennial celebration, which began in June and will continue through 1987.

The Michigan Travel Bureau has begun distributing them as part of an effort to encourage travel in Michigan during the Sesquicentennial year.

The map can be obtained free at numerous locations, including all MDOT district offices and welcome centers. Other distribution points include state police posts, district offices of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, local chambers of commerce, municipal government offices and regional tourist associations.

The Department of Transportation will mail maps to individuals upon request. Requests should be made on a post card (not in a sealed envelope) providing the name, address and ZIP code of the requester. Post cards should be mailed to: MAPS, Michigan Department of Transportation, P.O. Box 30050, Lansing, Mich. 48909.

Save energy

Most ovens do not need to be preheated as long as your recipe may indicate. The oven in your electric range can be turned off about ten minutes before the food is done; the residual heat will finish the job.

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