

Letter to the Editor

Realities in Organ Donation

To the Editor:

From the time the Organization for Transplants (ONT) was created in 1989 up to 2005, the organ donation rate in Spain increased from 14 to 35. A total of 1 per million population (pmp), by far the highest rate ever reached by a country, with at least 5 regions having 40 donors' pmp. This is the only example in the world of a large country with a sustained increase in deceased organ donation over a 15-year period.

In their editorial Roels et al. question the accuracy of using donors' pmp as an 'estimate of donation', a worldwide agreed crude indicator of a country's performance in donation (1). We certainly agree that more refined indicators can be built in order to measure different aspects in the donation and transplantation process, especially on a hospital or local basis. However, based on our long experience of collecting data for the Council of Europe on donation activity, we consider that donors' pmp is the most realistic and simple way to obtain this figure and allow comparisons among different countries. In fact, it is the only possible

one in most countries or regions where not even basic parameters are available.

As a second point, these authors suggest analyzing the efficiency of the donation process; either by using the rate of organs transplanted PMP from deceased donors or with the Procurement Efficiency Index. We consider that only deceased donors from the country in question should be taken into account to properly evaluate the efficiency of a country in the donation process. Otherwise, the donation efficiency is overestimated, especially in those small countries that frequently use foreign ('imported') organs. In fact, and according to the Eurotransplant 2005 annual report (2) and ONT data (3), the number of organs transplanted from deceased donors from within the country pmp (Figure 1) is 87.1 in Spain, 84.4 in Austria and 76.6 in Belgium. This figure clearly differs from that shown by the authors in the referred editorial and on the front page of the journal.

The Procurement Efficiency Index measures the efficiency of donation in deceased population for specific causes in a country. When we reviewed the WHO data about national

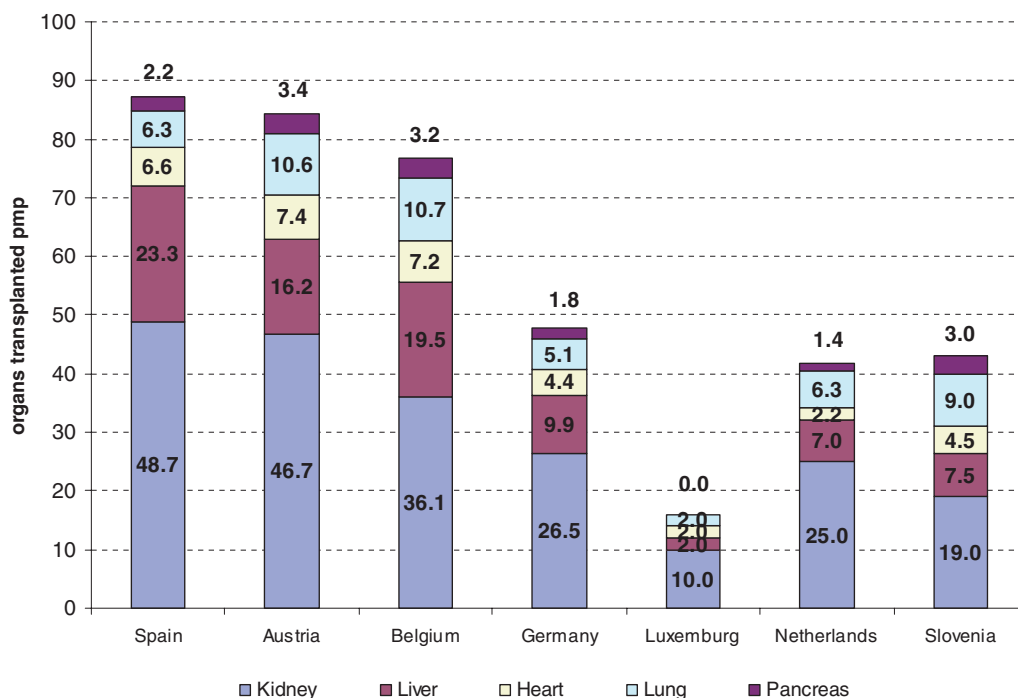


Figure 1: Organs from deceased donors implanted (pmp) according to the country of donation (Year 2005).

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age-standardized deaths per cause (4), we observed that the cerebrovascular death rate PMP in Austria is 423 (and not 334 as appears in Table 1 of the editorial). With this modification, the Austrian Index would be 0.148, below the Spanish one (0.154). In addition, we understand again that it would be more correct to calculate it using only organs transplanted from deceased donors from within one's own country. With these two corrections, the Spanish index would be 0.156, 0.143 in Austria and 0.128 in Belgium. Once again, the order varies from that presented in the referred paper.

Finally, in regards to the doubts raised about the use of organs from elderly donors, we would like to point out their high degree of utilization: the number of organs transplanted from donors over 60 years in Spain was 942 during 2005. Even more, the number of grafted organs per donor was 1.73, only one point below donors \leq 60 years (2.77).

In summary, donor rate pmp is a valid measurement to compare donation performance among countries, although more complicated indexes may be built to compare specific aspects of the donation and transplantation pro-

cess on a local basis. Procuring organs from donors aged over 60 years is an efficient way to increase the number of transplantations. This is especially true for the liver and kidneys, these organs having the highest number of patients in the waiting lists.

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4. <http://www.who.int/healthinfo/statistics/mortality/en/index.html>