

PRESS RELEASE

Worldwide Shortage of Donor Organs

Background Information on the World Day and European Day of Organ Donation in Berlin

Berlin, September 30, 2009. Transplant medicine is an international success story, hampered only by the worldwide shortage of donor organs. The celebration of the eleventh European Day of Organ Donation and the fifth World Day of Organ Donation brings together for the first time international experts, transplant recipients, and donor families in Berlin from Oct. 4 to 7, 2009 to raise public awareness about the shortage of donor organs. The Tenth International Organ Donation Congress of the International Society for Organ Donation and Procurement (ISODP) taking place directly after the celebrations of World Organ Donation Day provides a platform for the exchange of ideas and information among transplant physicians and other experts from all over the world. The worldwide shortage of donor organs is an incentive to all of us to take action toward a common goal: helping every patient waiting for an organ to benefit from medical progress by ensuring a just, efficient, and comprehensive provision of donor organs.

Both the World Day and the European Day of Organ Donation have up until now been primarily aimed at the medical profession and representatives from institutions and organizations. The first World Day of Organ Donation was held in Geneva in 2005, followed by celebrations in Japan, Kuwait, Argentina, and Switzerland, which focused on national issues and discussion of the medical aspects of organ donation. This year's celebration of the World Day and the European Day of Organ Donation in Berlin on October 4 features for the first time a large public event with an attractive programme in front of the Brandenburg Gate. The public event will be followed by the Tenth International Organ Donation Congress of the International Society for Organ Donation and Procurement (ISODP) to take place in the Berliner Congress Center (BCC) at Alexanderplatz from Oct. 5 to 7, 2009. The Deutsche Stiftung Organtransplantation will be commemorating Organ Donation Day by combining a public event promoting organ donation with a top-level scientific congress.

Alarming Figures Worldwide

The waiting lists are getting longer all over the world, and many patients will never receive a suitable organ. A total of 27 809 organs were transplanted in the European Union in 2008 but 63 283 patients were on the waiting lists at the end of that year. In the

same year, 3 812 patients died while waiting for a donor organ. In the USA, the number of new patients on the waiting list was double the number of patients receiving a transplant during the same period. Almost 110 000 patients are currently waiting for a transplant in the USA. Only 27 749 patients received the gift of a new life through a transplant in 2008.

In Germany, there are 14.6 organ donors per million population, which is below the EU average of 16.1 donors. With over 34 organ donors per million inhabitants, Spain is still the world leader in organ donation, followed by Portugal with 26.7 donors and the USA with 26.3 donors. Spain is a role model for other countries with its efficient organization of organ donation and hospital structures. When looking at international organ donation statistics, one has to take into account the differences in hospital organization and medical standards as well as national legislation.

According to the Organización Nacional de Trasplantes (ONT), a total of 99 321 organs were transplanted worldwide in 2007. However, no reliable data are available for Asia or Africa. This again underlines how important it is to pool expertise and take joint action. International networks are crucial to achieve long-term goals. Structures, procedures, and educational systems need to be implemented similar to those developed in Germany and other countries over the last 25 years. The primary aim is to establish general standards that will improve the quality and safety of organ transplants worldwide. A joint approach and legal regulation are also needed to eradicate corruption and transplant tourism. In the spring of 2008, representatives from 78 countries unanimously adopted a resolution condemning organ trafficking and transplant tourism. Joint action and public campaigns are the key to overcoming the chronic shortage of donor organs in the future.

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