Factors Influencing the Willingness of Allied Health Students to Donate Organs or Tissues

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ABSTRACT

Background. There has been an increase in the number of patients waiting for organ transplantation.

Methods. A questionnaire on knowledge and attitude toward organ donation was completed by 434 allied health students.

Results. Overall knowledge about the various aspects of organ donation was adequate and was higher among women and clinical students. Although the majority were willing to be living donors for their families, very few students supported deceased organ donation, and even fewer of them had thought about an organ donation card. Despite the good knowledge, an overall positive attitude toward deceased donation was held by only 44% of the students. In contrast, the attitude toward directed living organ donation to family members was favorable in 83.1% of the respondents, which seems to be influenced by cultural and sociodemographic factors. Our findings indicate that the most frequent cause of refusal to donate organs among students with negative attitudes was the mistrust of medical staff regarding brain death diagnosis (49.9%), followed by bodily concerns (18.1%) and religion (9.9%). Quite a few of our respondents supported commercial donation, which was attributed to the less knowledgeable groups. Respondents who were willing to donate organs indicated that the reason was for helping others and sympathy. This study identified that the main source of information about organ donation for the respondents was television, followed by relatives/friends and the internet.

Conclusions. The misconception of the students toward deceased donation needs to be improved by integrating the concepts of brain death within the curriculum of allied health students.

Solid organ transplantation is an integral part of modern health care. Donated organs transplanted from deceased or living individuals provide a way of giving the gift of life to patients with irreversible end-stage organ failure. However, while the number of organ donations has not significantly increased, there has been an increase in the number of patients waiting for organ or tissue transplantation, not only in Saudi Arabia [1] but also worldwide [2]. The severe shortage of donated organs has raised many ethical, moral, and societal issues regarding the supply and use of living and cadaveric donations. It has also led to the practice of organ trafficking for financial gain in some parts of the world at the expense of the poor [3].

The shortage of organ and tissue donors has been widely studied, and several factors explaining why individuals accept or refuse to consent to organ and tissue donation are reported in the literature [4]. Research indicates that the high refusal rate of consent can be lowered by the involvement of competent health workers knowledgeable in organ donations [5].

Based on statistics reported by the International Registry for Organ Donation and Transplantation, the percentage of people in Saudi Arabia who donated their organs after

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1215
The population consisted of 1st-year students at the beginning of the academic year and the clinical department’s students at higher levels. The desired size of the sample was selected with the use of a stratified random sample to get representation of all departments. A total of 500 students, representing 41.7% of the college’s students, were selected.

A well-structured, validated, and pretested questionnaire on knowledge, attitude, and practice was designed according to the study’s objectives as previously described [16]. The 1st part of the questionnaire included demographic information (age, gender, nationality, class level, and specialty of study). The 2nd part consisted of questions on knowledge-related aspects that may have an impact on willingness toward living organ/tissue donation and toward deceased organ/tissue donation, such as the concept of brain death, donation card, and legislation. The last part was composed of questions concerning attitudes toward organ donation and reasons for refusing to donate. Both closed and open-ended questions were included. Questions were validated through a panel of experts before conducting a pilot testing of 20 students, who were not included in the study, followed by interviews with the respondents to ensure the validity of each item. Data collected from the pilot test were tested for the internal consistency of the questionnaire with the use of SPSS, which revealed a reliability coefficient (Cronbach alpha) of 0.86. The questionnaire was then administered to the participants. A face-to-face interview was performed later whenever unclear answers to the questionnaire were encountered.

Differences in distribution were tested with the use of chi-square tests. In addition, factors affecting approval of organ donation were analyzed with the use of multivariable logistic regression, the results of which are presented as odds ratios with associated 95% confidence intervals.

The results were analyzed and tested for statistical significance when required with the use of SPSS version 20.0 (SPSS, Chicago, Illinois). The statistical significance was set at $P \leq 0.05$ for all analyses.

RESULTS

A total of 500 self-administered questionnaires were distributed, of which 434 (86.6%) were successfully completed and returned.

The characteristics of the responding students of Prince Sultan Military College of Health Sciences are presented in Table 1. Participants consisted of 202 men and 232 women with an overall average age of 21.44 ± 3.97 years. There were 142 1st-year preclinical students and 292 clinical students distributed among the various departments (Table 1).

Out of the total participants, 60.2% of all participants correctly identified the types of organ donation, ie, living and deceased, with a slightly lower knowledge among the preclinical students (Table 2). The general living organ donation requirements, such as physical and mental fitness and lack of infectious diseases, were well known among all groups with an overall average of 93.5%. Overall knowledge about the various organs and tissues that can be donated, the essential required matching tests, and the age limit of living donors were 70.7%, 70.8%, and 67.4%, respectively. Surprisingly, the preclinical students demonstrated better knowledge than the clinical ones on the types of donated organs and the required matching tests. Knowledge about
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