

Transplantation

A study of attitudes towards kidney transplantation in different cultures

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The proportion of those awaiting kidney transplants is much higher in the ethnic minority groups than in the general population. In one large city nearly 30% awaiting transplants are of Asian origin, as compared to 9% of the general population. It is thought that this figure will rise steeply by 2000 AD. In that area a special worker has been appointed to raise awareness of renal problems amongst the Muslim population. A study of the waiting list in the Unit where the author works shows that, in October 1997, out of 173 patients on the transplant waiting list, nearly 1 in 5 from Blood Group O came from the ethnic minorities, 1 in 4 from Blood Group A and 1 in 3 from Blood Group B. These figures are discussed in greater detail.

This study analyses attitudes towards accepting a cadaver graft or a living related graft for kidney transplantation. A questionnaire sent to leading members of different cultures and religions analyses their opinions on the subject. Despite understanding of the needs by well educated groups there is still much ignorance and fear. The practice of burying bodies quickly after death means that requests for organ donations are often refused.

Whilst most people of different faiths are prepared to accept a transplant, though there are exceptions, many are still unaware of the need to donate a kidney if tragedy occurs. A belief that the body should be whole for the next life causes problems for some people. The possibility of using pig kidneys raises further questions.

There needs to be greater sensitivity to the attitudes and beliefs of those from different cultures and faiths. Much greater awareness and education is also needed if those from ethnic minorities, who are awaiting transplants, are to have acceptable waiting periods.