

Organ Allocation

If you were in charge of deciding to whom you would give a life-saving organ, how would you go about doing it? There are many ethical considerations that arise in the process of allocating scarce resources. Should you use emotional guidelines, or an objective and systematic approach?

We recommend that students break up in to small groups and read aloud the following scenarios. Discuss how you would make the decision. What *halachic* considerations would come into play? Once you have gone through these scenarios try to create a set of guidelines based on the scenario outcomes.

Do not read the scenarios all at once. Read one, then discuss, then move on to the next one.

Scenario #1

A kidney is available for transplant. Many people are waiting for kidneys but only a few are available. Not everyone will get one, and many will die. A computerized search indicates that the kidney that is available matches medically with two people. The first is a 30 year-old mother with 3 children. The second is a 65 year-old man, father to 3 and grandfather of 7. Who should receive this kidney? Don't be afraid to say that there Change to: If you need other information to make your decision, state clearly..... other information you would need to know before you make your decision, but state clearly what that information is and why you would need to know it.

Note: Consider that while there is no age limit to receiving organs from both medical and legal perspectives, the Ethics Committee at the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) states that “transplantation should be carefully considered if the candidate’s reasonable life expectancy is significantly shorter than the reasonably expected ‘life span’ of the transplanted organ.”

Scenario #2

A world-renowned scientist who made great advances in the cure for cancer needs a liver. Should he be moved to the top of the list to receive a liver even though other people have been on the waiting list for a longer time.

Scenario #3

A world-renowned scientist who has made great advances in the cure for cancer needs a liver. The research he is currently working on is not yet finished and has the potential to save thousands of lives. Should he be moved to the top of the list to receive a liver even though other people have been on the linechange to: waiting list for a long time before him.

Scenario 2 and 3 can be combined to one sheanrio.

Scenario #4

A heart becomes available for transplant. The two potential matches are a 25 year-old male serving a 10 year prison sentence for assault that crippled another man and a 65 year-old school teacher. Who should receive the organ?

Note that the Ethics Committee at the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) states "...convicted criminals have been sentenced only to a specific punishment and have not been sentenced by society to an additional punishment of an inability to receive consideration for medical services."

Scenario #5

South Carolina is currently considering a law which would allow prisoners to donate a kidney in exchange for 180 day reduction in their prison sentence. Is this ethical?

Other questions to consider:

- Should the purchase of organs, from living people, be made legal?
- Should those who have agreed to become organ donors get preferential treatment if they need an organ?
- Should families donating a loved-ones organs be allowed to dictate the religion of the recipient?