

## Dramatic increase in organ transplants recorded in Israel in 2011

The spike in donations, 64 percent more than in 2010, attributed to financial compensation program.

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Israel had 117 kidney transplants from living donors over the past year, 64 percent more than in 2010, according to the National Transplant Center's annual report. In August 2010 living donors began receiving compensation of several thousand shekels, which may have contributed to the increase.

Compensation to living donors covers 40 days of lost wages and monetary benefits of up to NIS 30,000 for proven expenses of up to five years. These include transportation costs, supplementary and private medical insurance, disability insurance, life insurance, five psychological treatment sessions, and a week-long convalescence vacation.

The "chain of living donors" program was also launched in Israel during 2011. The program enables relatives of Israelis waiting for a kidney transplant to be donors for others on the waiting list, in exchange for their own family member receiving a new kidney through the same network. This model is used in situations where no suitable match is found for transplant candidates among their own relatives.

Developed in Holland, the program was brought to Israel at the initiative of Prof. Francis Delmonico of Harvard University, president of the international Transplantation Society and a consultant to the World Health Organization on preventing organ trafficking.

Israel experienced a dramatic increase in the number of organ transplants in 2011, totaling 384, 68 percent higher than the previous year, although the number of transplants performed in 2010 was particularly low. Kidney transplants from deceased donors were 2.37 times greater in 2011, with 123 operations, than in 2010. There were 69 liver transplants from deceased donors in the past year, 2.15 times as many the previous year, 59 lung transplants, representing an 84 percent increase, and 23 heart transplants - 2.09 times the number in 2010.

Another milestone was reached in 2011 when the percentage of families consenting to organ donations in cases of brain death surpassed the 50 percent mark, reaching 55 percent - a total of 89 donors.

The number of Israelis waiting for transplants at the beginning of 2012 - 1,041 - is less than the 1,117 a year ago, but still high, with 729 waiting for a kidney, 135 for a liver, 96 for a heart, 70 for lungs, one for a heart and lung transplant, and 10 for a kidney and pancreas. In addition, 700 Israelis need a cornea transplant, significantly less than the 1,300 awaiting the procedure a year ago.

In the past year 105 Israelis died while waiting for an organ transplant, as opposed to 124 in 2010.

The Priority Law, which takes effect in April, will give holders of Adi donor cards priority if they ever need a transplant.

The number of cardholders has considerably increased recently following a publicity campaign touting the new law. Anyone signing the card before April will be immediately eligible for the benefit, while those signing after the law goes into effect will need to wait three years for eligibility after signing.

The number of organ donor signatures rose 71,229 during the year to a total of 632,300 while another 20,000 requests for the cards are being processed by the National Transplant Center.

But despite the optimistic figures, Israel's rate of organ donations from the deceased remains at the bottom of the list for Western countries. According to a 2010 report by the National Transplant Organization and the World Health Organization, Israel had 31 organ donations per million residents, higher than Greece with 15 and Lebanon with 18, but lower than Austria, with the highest rate of 91, the U.S. (90), France (72), Britain (64), Germany (62), and even Turkey (43) and Iran (35).

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