

## Campaigns flopped, Israelis still reluctant to donate organs

Most say they would but don't sign Transplant Center donor cards.

By Ido Efrati | Mar. 6, 2014 | 10:50 AM |  2

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While most Israelis say they would be willing to donate their organs, few sign the "Adi" donor card issued by the National Transplant Center, a new study financed by the National Institute for Health Policy Research shows.

The study shows that 68 percent of the people interviewed said they would like to be organ donors, but only 16 percent of them reported having signed a donor card.

The study also shows that 64 percent of the people said their willingness to donate organs would be greater if they knew their organs would be donated to a person who himself agreed to be a donor. In the Arab sector 84 percent made this statement, compared to 52 and 50 percent in the Jewish religious and ultra-Orthodox communities, respectively.

"I urge to increase the awareness for organ donation among both the Jewish and Arab population," Health Minister Yael German said on Wednesday at a conference to encourage organ donation in the Arab community. "Organ donation crosses ethnic boundaries. It has been proved that Jews donate organs to Arabs and Arabs donate to Jews, in everyone's struggle to live."

Israelis' basic reluctance to donate organs has been consistent over the years. A study published in November 2012, based on 799 interviewees, showed that 74.4 percent had not signed a donor's card, although 60.8 percent said they intended to do so. The study also found that women were more ready to donate organs than men, especially after death and that Jews were more inclined to donate organs after death than Arabs.

In recent years the number of organs available for transplant is dwindling, mainly due to technological developments that reduce the number of people who are classified as brain dead, a state enabling the removal of their organs for donation.

In Israel the wait for transplants is long. More than 1,000 Israelis are waiting for an organ transplant. Most of them – some 730 – need a kidney transplant. About 140 need a liver transplant, 100 need a heart transplant and about 70 need a lung transplant. The average waiting time is 4.3 years for a kidney, 2.2 years for a liver and seven months for a lung or heart.

According to a National Transplant Center report, some 45 percent of the families of people who are brain dead refuse to donate the patient's organs, significantly more compared to other countries.

"One of the reasons for this stems from the erroneous organ donation policy in Israel," says Dr. Gil Siegal, head of the Center for Health Law and Bioethics at the Ono Academic College, who conducted the study. "The policy should be based not only on marketing and media strategy, but on incentives for cooperation."

Siegal said that the legislation and procedure in Israel broadcast a weak message, saying "if you want to – we'll be happy if you donate" instead of "the right thing to do is to donate organs, so that you or your children will also have a chance to receive an organ if they need it."

"If each person knew he'd get an organ donation only if everyone else agrees to donate their organs, then more people would be willing to donate organs," Siegal said.