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Israel - Rabbis Urge Religious Public to Volunteer as Organ Donors

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Israel - A new initiative designed to raise the number of people signing up for organ donation cards has been formally approved by Tzohar, the religious-Zionist rabbinical group.

In a meeting at Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem, 40 rabbis from the organization voted to approve a new organ donor card and framework which seeks to reduce any concerns potential religious organ donors may have that their organs will be harvested in a manner in keeping with Jewish law.

“We want to encourage Israeli society to acknowledge and embrace the importance of saving someone else’s life,” Tzohar chairman Rabbi David Stav told The Jerusalem Post on Sunday. “We also believe that it is immoral to be willing to accept organs from others while at the same time not be willing to donate your own organs if such circumstances should arise.”

Brain death was established by the most respected arbiter of Jewish law of recent times, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, to be the relevant criterion for declaring death, although he stipulated that tests be conducted to confirm.

For this purpose, an organization called Arevim, comprising more than 30 doctors around the country competent in the Jewish laws regarding the issue, was set up.

Director of the Bilvavi system, Haim Falk, told the Post that being a signatory to the new system will mean that a doctor from Arevim will be present when the time of death is pronounced to provide an extra guarantee that any transplants will be in accordance with Jewish law.

There are three halachic concerns regarding organ donation: a prohibition against desecrating a corpse; delaying burial; and deriving any kind of benefit from a corpse. Most rabbis today accept that the life-saving possibilities made possible by organ donation outweigh these concerns.

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