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# N.Y. Man Pleads Guilty to Organ Trafficking

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A Brooklyn, N.Y., man admitted in court Thursday that he purchased human kidneys from live Israeli donors that were ultimately transplanted into three New Jersey residents.

Levy Izhak Rosenbaum, 60, earned \$410,000 from the three black-market sales and was conspiring to broker another deal when he was caught, federal prosecutors said in a statement. He received another \$10,000 as down payment for that transaction.

Rosenbaum's attorneys, Ronald Kleinberg and Richard Finkel, issued a statement saying their client's motivation was to save the lives of people who would have died without the transplants because more than 90,000 Americans are on transplant waiting lists.

"The transplants were successful and the donors and recipients are now leading full and healthy lives," the attorneys said. "In fact, because of the transplants and for the first time in many years, the recipients are no longer burdened by the medical and substantial health dangers associated with dialysis and kidney failure."

But in a press release, New Jersey U.S. Attorney Paul Fishman called Rosenbaum's actions "an affront to human dignity" and said these black-market organ sales offer an unfair, life-saving advantage to people who can afford to buy organs.

Rosenbaum, an Israeli citizen, admitted the sales took place between 2006 and 2009. He was ultimately caught in a sting involving the FBI and a woman who told Rosenbaum her uncle needed a kidney transplant. According to prosecutors, Rosenbaum told the woman he knew the organ sales were illegal, but he had been in the business a long time. They agreed on a price of \$150,000, part of which he said was to pay individuals for their part in finding a donor.

He faces three counts related to the kidney brokering and another count of conspiracy. He could spend up to 20 years in prison and have to pay a stiff fine. He will also pay back the \$420,000 he earned and is under house arrest until he is sentenced in February.

Prosecutors did not name the hospitals where the transplants took place, but as for whether the institutions should hold any accountability, Dr. Linda Chen, surgical director of the Live Donor Kidney Program at the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine, said it is difficult to determine whether individuals are being honest about where organs come from.

Chen also said that because waiting lists for kidneys across the country are so long — it is about two-and-a-half years in Florida and seven to nine years in New York — it makes sense that there is such a profitable black market out there.

"But this is a big blow for the transplant community," she said. "We need to get the right message out there about the fact that it's a highly regulated process governed by the United Network for Organ Sharing and the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network."

Chen also said there could be safety issues involved with internationally acquired organs.

"It's always a safety issue," she said. "How long can a kidney remain in a box while it's transported? There could be issues with prolonging preservation time."