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Rabbi Dr. Avraham Walfish

Your article regarding the recent Rabbinical Council of America report on brain stem death and organ donations (Dec. 3) quoted RCA President Moshe Kletenick as saying that the report took no position and was designed to serve as an educational tool to assist local rabbis in studying the issue.

After reading the report, I am sorry to say that it is anything but sincere and unbiased. While ostensibly refraining from adopting a position on the issue of brain stem death, the report is studded with rhetorical devices and tendentious presentation of the evidence that guide the reader to the only supportable conclusion — that “changing” the definition of death requires a standard of proof that the supporters of such “change” have not met.

The committee drafting this report would have performed a greater service to the rabbinic community had they acknowledged their position explicitly, alerting readers that a fair presentation of the opposing position should be sought elsewhere.

Full disclosure: I am the son of Rabbi Binyamin Walfish, former executive vice president of the RCA, whose testimony regarding Rabbi Soloveitchik’s acceptance of brain stem death was sidelined in the report on the basis of speculative evaluations, without bothering to hear my father’s story or allow him to respond to their doubts.





I am also the bereft grandfather of Halleli, of blessed memory, whose heart, liver and kidneys were donated to save other children after her brain stem death had been confirmed medically by professor Avraham Steinberg and halachically by Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu z"l.

I do not believe that my family history uniquely qualifies me to judge the medical and halachic evidence regarding the validity of brain stem death, but I don't think it disqualifies me, either. In my extensive study of the issues that preoccupied my own family for several weeks, I have seen surveys of the literature that have presented both sides fairly and impartially. The RCA report is not one of them.

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