

EDITORIALS

LETTERS

Organ Transplants

The controversy over brain-stem death, or BSD, will never achieve consensus in the Orthodox community ("New Front In Fight Over Organ Donation," May 14). Unfortunately, Orthodox institutions feel they can't touch this issue unless there is a unified opinion about BSD. But rarely is there unanimity on halachic issues, and one can donate life-saving organs even after cessation of heartbeat. That is why the Halachic Organ Donor (HOD) Society was created, offering a unique organ donor card that sidesteps the BSD controversy.

The Jewish Week's article mistakenly asserted that Rabbis Shachter and Willig oppose organ donation. They do not. They are in favor of saving lives and both have told me it is permissible to donate organs from a Jew to the general population once a person's heart stops beating. Rabbi Willig has even approved of rabbis registering for a HOD organ donor card provided they choose that option.

The Orthodox Union has now deferred to its rabbinic body, the Rabbinical Council of America. In 1991, the RCA officially accepted BSD and organ donation and published a corresponding "living will." A number of RCA rabbis, who rejected BSD, resigned, leaving this issue a stillborn initiative and the RCA's "position" debatable.

I can appreciate the political complexity of this issue. I hope, however, that the new RCA leadership will issue a public statement finally clarifying the RCA's position. If it does, I am confident these leaders will adopt the HOD Society's approach, which is to support organ donation in general while not taking a position on brain-stem death, and leaving the timing of the donation up to the individual rabbi to adjudicate.

Robby Berman

*Founder and Director
Halachic Organ Donor Society
New York, N.Y.*