

Fairness in Organ Transplantation

What is the issue?

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- Foreign nationals have been found to be receiving disproportionately more cardiac transplants over locals in India despite dearth of donors.

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- Recently, a controversy has erupted in this regard, opening up a debate that could help in correcting the faultiness in our transplantation policy.

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What are the problems in the India's current transplant policy?

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- India's organ allocation program currently lacks transparency.
- While Tamil Nadu has one of the best "deceased donor programs" in the country, there are some concerns regarding alleged preferential allocations.
- Recently, the controversy has heated up due to a leaked communication from the head of the "National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation".
- As public credibility is vital for the sustenance of any program, faith among the masses needs to be restored at the earliest.

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Why are foreigners getting more transplants done?

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- While there is a foreigner skew for recipients across organs (liver, kidneys etc...), the trend is pronounced in heart transplants.
- This is because, unlike others, heart transplant require a deceased donor,

which is difficult to spot in countries that don't have dedicated programs.

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- So patients with advanced heart failure from countries that don't have a deceased donor programme have no option but to try their luck in India.

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- As most heart transplants are performed in corporate hospitals, the costs in India are well beyond a large majority of the local population.

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- Hence, as affordability among foreign nationals is more, there is a clear skew that is visible among recipients.

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What needs to be done?

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- For ensuring credibility in the deceased organ donation program, mere calls for transparency in organ allocation won't work.

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- Rampant privatisation has led to a profit oriented approach to health and has thereby financially skewed organ transplants to the rich.

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- We will have to ensure that organs will go to those who need them the most rather than to those who can pay for them.

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- Subsidising transplantation cost (in private) and quota based organ allocation to public hospitals are some options that can be considered to ensure fairness.

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- This would mean, public hospitals should step up their capacity to integrate with 'deceased donor programmes' to catch up with their private counterparts.

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What is the way ahead?

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- One of the reasons behind Europe's high donation rates is public trust in their respective nationalised health schemes.

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- To ensure that such aspects are mimicked in India, we need imbibe among

the mass, the feeling of inclusiveness.

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- As India has comprehensively embraced liberal markets (even in health), innovative policies are needed to ensure equity in health access.

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- Thus far, Tamil Nadu has led the way in deceased donation and also has a good record of public medical institutional infrastructure.

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- Hence, its model can become an all India template after some alterations.

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Source: The Hindu

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