

ORGAN DONATION – GOVERNANCE

To address a stark gender disparity in organ transplantation, India's National Organ & Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) has issued a new advisory. The rules now give priority in organ allocation to women and the near relatives of deceased donors who are on the waiting list. In a significant move to address gender disparity and promote organ donation, the National Organ & Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) has issued a new advisory giving priority to women and relatives of deceased donors awaiting transplants.

The Status of Organ Donation

Defining Organ Donation – This is a critical surgical procedure where an organ (like a kidney or heart), tissue (like corneas), or a group of cells is removed from a living or deceased person (the donor) and surgically transplanted into another person (the recipient).

Global Shortfall – The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights a stark gap between demand and supply. While over 1,30,000 solid organ transplants are performed globally each year, this number meets only about 10% of the total worldwide need, leaving millions waiting.

The Indian Gender Paradox – Data from NOTTO reveals a significant gender imbalance in India's organ donation landscape between 2019 and 2023:

Donors – Women constitute the majority of living organ donors, accounting for 63.8% of the total.

Recipients – Despite donating more, women receive far fewer organs. Men are the primary beneficiaries, making up 69.8% of all recipients. This disparity highlights a systemic issue where women are more often the givers, while men are more often the receivers.

Why Does Gender Disparity Exist in Organ Donation?

Patriarchal Social Norms – In many Indian families, women are socially conditioned to be primary caregivers and are often expected to make "sacrifices" for the family's well-being. This societal pressure extends to organ donation, where they are frequently encouraged to donate to male relatives.

Economic Factors – Men are typically viewed as the primary breadwinners. Consequently, families are often hesitant to risk a man's health and earning capacity by having him undergo a major surgery like organ donation. The responsibility then disproportionately falls on female family members.

Neglect of Women's Health – The disparity is also evident in who receives care. Male patients are often prioritized by families to receive transplants when needed. In contrast, female patients requiring an organ transplant are underrepresented as recipients, often due to neglect or a lower priority placed on their health.

Key Directives in the NOTTO Advisory

Strengthening the National Registry – The advisory mandates that all hospitals and medical centers involved in organ or tissue transplantation or retrieval must compulsorily submit their data to the National Registry maintained by NOTTO. This will ensure better tracking, transparency, and management of the national organ pool.

Prioritizing Families of Deceased Donors – In a move to encourage donation, the advisory grants priority in organ allocation to the near relatives (like spouse, children, parents) of a deceased donor if they are also on a waiting list for an organ transplant.

Addressing Gender Disparity – To directly counter the gender imbalance, the new guidelines will provide additional points in the organ allocation criteria for women on the waiting list. This will effectively boost their position in the queue and improve their chances of receiving a transplant.

Permanent Posts for Transplant Coordinators – State governments have been directed to create permanent posts for transplant coordinators in all hospitals that perform transplants or retrievals. These coordinators play a vital role in – Counseling the families of potential donors, Managing the complex documentation required, Facilitating a smooth and ethical transplantation process.

About NOTTO

Structure - The National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) is the apex national-level body in India for organ donation. It operates under the Directorate General of Health Services within the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Core Functions - NOTTO's National Network division is responsible for coordinating all pan-India activities related to the procurement and distribution of organs and tissues. It also maintains the national registry for organ and tissue donation and transplantation in the country.

India's Legal Framework for Organ Donation

Transplantation of Human Organs Act (THOA), 1994 - This is the primary legislation in India governing organ donation.

Objective - It aims to regulate the removal, storage, and transplantation of human organs for therapeutic purposes and, crucially, to prevent commercial dealings or trade in human organs.

Who can Donate (Living Donors) - The Act allows living donations, primarily from close relatives such as parents, siblings, children, spouse, grandparents, and grandchildren.

Altruistic Donations - Donations from distant relatives, in-laws, or long-time friends are permitted but require additional scrutiny to ensure no financial exchange is involved. Evidence of long-term association or friendship is required.

The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues (THOT) Rules, 2014 - These rules provide the specific guidelines and operational safeguards under the main 1994 Act. They are designed to prevent organ trafficking, promote cadaver donation (donation from deceased persons), and ensure ethical transplantation practices.

Key Facts & Dates for Organ Donation Awareness

World Organ Donation Day - Observed annually on August 13th to raise global awareness.

Indian Organ Donation Day - Previously celebrated on November 27th, it is now observed on August 3rd (starting from 2023). This date commemorates India's first successful deceased heart transplant, which took place on August 3, 1994.

Organ Donation Month - NOTTO has declared the month of July as the National Organ Donation Month to intensify awareness campaigns.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/what-has-notto-said-about-organ-donations-to-women-explained/article69961757.ece>