

EDITORIAL

Reviving a national strategy roadmap for organ and tissue donation in South Africa

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In September 2019, a two-day workshop ahead of the Southern African Transplantation Society congress brought together South African champions for organ donation and leaders from the International Society of Organ Donation and Procurement (ISODP) at a high-level workshop focused on creating a national strategy roadmap to improve organ donation in South Africa. The full report is available via the supplementary materials on the *African Journal of Nephrology* website.

South Africa performs poorly with respect to organ donation compared to countries with similar health expenditure. In 2019, the overall kidney transplant rate was 6.4 per million population (pmp), with 58.3% of the donor kidneys derived from deceased donors [1]. With a deceased donation rate of only 1.6 pmp, it follows that improving deceased donation rates would be effective to rapidly improve access to transplantation. Re-engineering health systems, embedding quality assurance, improving coordination across sectors, and standardising training and education are sustainable and cost-effective ways of achieving gains in deceased donation.

This need is highlighted by the estimates of the increasing burden of kidney disease on the continent. Poverty, infections – including HIV – and components of the metabolic syndrome result in a growing tsunami of chronic kidney disease (CKD) on the African continent. An estimated 15% will have CKD, of whom 10% may require kidney replacement therapy (KRT) in their lifetime. Globally, even with successful transplantation programmes, up to half of patients in need of KRT remain on dialysis [2]. South Africa, with an estimated population of 60 million people [3], could end up with one million people requiring unaffordable KRT during their lifetime. The best option to manage costs, open limited dialysis slots for new patients, and optimise outcomes is by increasing transplantation rates.

Seven key strategic priorities were identified as the major focus areas that are required to improve South African organ and tissue donation:

- Organ donation potential (identification and referral) by treating clinicians
- Organ donation conversion (consent practices and rates) by transplant centres supported by treating clinicians
- Data collection (for quality improvement and public accountability) by hospitals
- Foundational system development for better coordination
- Legislation and policy development to support governance and compliance with leading practices
- Professional education and practice
- Public awareness programmes.

This vision of the strategic roadmap aligns well with the goal of the National Health Insurance (NHI) scheme to improve access to healthcare resources for the whole population in an open, transparent, accountable and cost-effective manner. The roadmap outlines a clear strategy towards a substantial increase in organ and tissue donation and the consequent benefits to the health of South Africans.

To participate effectively in the NHI, organ transplantation in South Africa will require investment in creating a framework of standardised, well-coordinated processes in a transparent system with continually monitored measurable outcomes. The development of a system such as the NHI is an opportunity for the transplantation community to integrate donor and recipient processes, standardise policies nationally, and improve the measurement of donation processes, waiting times, organ transplantation and outcomes.

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A core political goal of universal health coverage is to engender social solidarity. This aligns perfectly with organ donation and transplantation. The cultivation of a new national social contract and a culture of donation in South Africa would increase donation rates and transplantation activity. Under such a universal, transparent and nationally coordinated system, public value would be maximised.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic shut down transplantation programmes in South Africa to various degrees. As we recover from the disruption of the pandemic, it is an opportune time to revive this important initiative and rebuild intelligently to recover lost time.

We need a mandate for change in organ and tissue donation in South Africa to do this. Engagement with the National Department of Health is necessary to support local expertise (distributed across multiple disciplines) and invest in the infrastructure of a coordinating body to administer these activities in a publicly accountable manner.

Supplementary material

Organ and tissue donation in South Africa: creating a national strategy roadmap. This report is available via the supplementary materials on the *African Journal of Nephrology* website.

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Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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