Summary

Introduction: The responsiveness to organ donation in Israel is very low compared to other industrial countries. In 2004 the percentage of people who signed for a donor card (EDI) in the Israeli population was 4% vs. 13-35% in other industrial countries. Data of the responsiveness of medical school students and teachers to organ donation is very sparse and has not been studied in Israel. In addition there is very little information about the viewpoint of the relatives of potential organ recipients.

Aims: The aim of this study was to determine the awareness, attitudes and/or the deterrents confronting individuals who are close to the organ donation issue. The tested groups included medical school students (first and sixth year), teachers, doctors who treat the potential recipients and the donors, and relatives of candidate organ recipients waiting for the donation. The emotional, lack of education, awareness and reasons for the reluctance to donate organs were also examined.

Methods: A questionnaire was designed that the responsiveness and attitude towards organ donation and the signing of a donor card. In addition, the questionnaire examined the reasons for disagreement to organ donation and/or holding an organ donation card as well as the decision whether to donate in cases where there is conflict between the donor card and the wishes of the family. The questionnaire was anonymous and was distributed to medical students in their first year (n=97) sixth year (n=95), faculty teachers (n=68) and recipients relatives (n=29). More the 90% of the subjects filled the questionnaire.

Results: Seventy three percent of all those interviewed (n=289) expressed a positive attitude to donate their organs, but only 43% reported having a signed donor card. The most common reasons for not having a card were lack of awareness about organ donation and the donor card. Other reasons reported: fear against death, family reasons, religious beliefs and general lack of information about the issue. The willingness of the medical
students to donate organs increased from 57% in the first year to 85% in the sixth year. However, the rate of students actually holding a donor card was significantly lower than just expressing a theoretical willingness to donate. This rate increased from 29% (first year) to 61% (sixth year). Eighty five percent of the medical faculty teachers agreed to donate but only 44% reported holding a card. Sixty percent of the recipient’s relatives agreed to donate but only 31% have a donation card. One third of the individuals holding the donor card preferred that their family members make the ultimate decision whether to donate their organs.

**Conclusions:** An increase in the awareness of organ donation exists in individuals close to the issue, when compared to the general population. However, this willingness is far from being conclusive since the actual rate of agreement is low: less than 50% of the interviewers reported possessing a donation card. This study shows that the main reasons are indifference, ignorance and other blocks. Exposure to the organ donation issue such as emotional involvement of the relatives’ recipients or knowledge and education of the medical student and teachers can increase the compliance of organ donation. However medical teachers who are supposed to set a personal example, did not show either an increased willingness or knowledge base. These findings support the need to expand the education and discussion of the organ donation issue among all the groups in this research. In addition there is a social marketing challenge in the medical community as well as the whole public. Increasing awareness among the population may help bridge the gap between those desperately waiting for organ transplantation and those willingness to commit themselves and donate their organs.

**Bibliography**

7. המשרד לערים ואגודת העיתונות הענישה בא"ח