

WHAT SHOULD MONEY BUY? THE ETHICS OF ORGANS FOR SALE.

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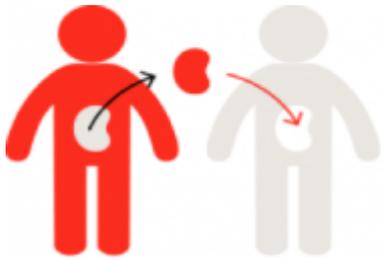
How is value calculated? [Webster Dictionary defines value](#) as “the monetary worth of something” or “a fair return or equivalent in goods, services, or money for something exchanged” Should everything have a monetary worth? When it comes to how much a living organ is worth, there are factors that need to be considered. Is the organ worth more to the recipient, or to the donor? This is an ethical question that is hard to answer, but is a question in debate.



There are multiple ethical facets to organ donation:

1. [First, do no harm:](#)
 1. The donor has no medical need for surgery.
 2. There is a risk/benefit balance that needs to be considered. The organ recipient reaps disproportionate benefits compared to the donor.
2. Informed consent: (for more information on informed consent go [here](#))
 1. The donor must be competent and capable of understanding the risks involved.
 2. Must do so without any form of coercion.
3. Regarding the question of financial compensation,

[vulnerable populations](#) must be considered where a donor may lack the capacity to make an autonomous, voluntary decision to agree to donate an organ.



There is a shortage of organs for patients in need of transplants. According to [U.S. Department of Health & Human Services](#) there is a continuing decline in available donors. There is a question on how to obtain more organ donations. Proponents for selling organs are suggesting suspending or [revoking the prohibitions](#) of the National Organ Transplant Act of 1984 (NOTA). National Organ Transplant Act prohibits the sale of organs based on the idea of valuable consideration. [According to the NOTA](#) *“The term “valuable consideration” does not include the reasonable payments associated with the removal, transplantation, implantation, processing, preservation, quality control, and storage of a human organ or the expenses of travel, housing, and lost wages incurred by the donor of human organ in connection with the donation of the organ”*. Current arguments for and against the selling of organs consider and evaluate several ethical questions.

Current [arguments](#) in favor of financial compensation for organs:

1. Because demand for organs outpaces supply, it is believed that donation rates would increase if financial incentives were permitted.
2. Organ donors are the only participants that receive no tangible benefits.
3. Polls indicate societal support of compensation.
4. Legal compensation of semen, hair, and plasma suggests the right of a person to use body parts as they wish.



Current arguments against compensation for organs:

1. Potential abuse of [vulnerable populations](#), such as those in a lower socioeconomic bracket.
2. Reduction of altruistic donors who feel that compensation weakens their donations.
3. [Reduced donor disclosure](#) due to motives based on compensation rather than altruism.
4. Financial neutrality is a more ethical alternative.



For living organ donations such as kidney and liver transplants, the costs can add up for the donor. Travel, housing, and lost wages are all expenses that a living donor can incur. [According to Warren, et. al.](#), donors can incur an average of \$6,000 in additional expenses. The goal of financial neutrality or at least the removal of "[disincentives](#)" is considered a more ethical approach to obtaining more donors.

Proponents of [financial neutrality](#) suggest the coverage of:

- Direct medical expenses: all pre and post donation costs related to the procedure
- Direct nonmedical expenses: travel, housing, food, etc.
- Indirect expenses: recovery time, lost wages

The recipient's insurance may cover these expenses; however if it does not, there are organizations available to help. The [National Living Donor Assistance Center](#) (NLDAC) works to lessen the financial burden on donors through federal government grant funding.

Although some countries allow the selling of organs, the theory of supply and demand may not be the best or most ethical motive. There are many other factors to consider.

Let us know your thoughts about the ethics of organ donation in the comments section. We'd love to hear from you!

Thanks for tuning in to the Hart Clinical Consultants Ethics Series!