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ASOCIATIA EUROPEANA A MEDICILOR DIN SPITALE**

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New hope for patients needing donor organs

People needing liver transplants or other organ donations should face shorter waiting times after MEPs voted on Tuesday for measures to improve the supply, safety and quality of donated organs.

The EP Public Health Committee approved two reports that seek to alleviate the organ shortage through national quality programmes and better cooperation between Member States. MEPs emphasise that organ donations must be altruistic, voluntary and unpaid and living donations should be seen as complementary to post-mortem donations and "may be carried out where there is no suitable organ available from a deceased person".

Over the past 50 years organ transplantation has become an established practice worldwide and is often the only possible treatment. Yet the queues are long - about 60,000 patients are now on waiting lists in the EU - and every day 12 people die while on a list.

National quality programmes to guarantee quality and safety of organs

A key step is to designate the authorities in each country responsible for quality and safety standards of human organs intended for transplantation. This is the purpose of an EU directive examined in a report by Miroslav Mikolášik (EPP, SK). The report says a competent authority can be either a public or private non-profit body, organisation or institution.

The authority will have to maintain a national quality programme covering all steps from donation to transplantation or disposal, based on rules laid down in the directive. Member States can keep or introduce more stringent protective measures, add MEPs. To ease cooperation, the Commission will set up a network of authorities and establish systems to transmit information.

The authorities will approve donor procurement organisations and transplant centres, set up reporting and management systems, collect data on the outcome of transplants and supervise organ swaps with other Member States and third countries. Traceability from donor to patient and vice-versa will be part of the system, along with reporting arrangements for adverse reactions, to protect patients and donors alike. Confidentiality of patient data must be respected in line with national rules, say MEPs.

Fighting organ trafficking and living donors

Donations of human organs need to be "altruistic, voluntary and unpaid", notes the EP committee, but "the principle of non-payment shall not prevent living donors from receiving compensation, which is strictly limited to making good the expenses and inconveniences related to the donation". The committee adds that any financial incentives or benefit for a potential donor must be avoided. Member States must ban advertising of any need for, or the availability of, human organs where the purpose is financial gain.

A controversial point was the status of living donors. MEPs decided that "living donations should be seen as complementary to post-mortem donations and may be carried out where there is no suitable organ available from a deceased person". They add that "Living donations are predominantly carried out among family members and close relatives and/or for the benefit of a recipient with whom the donor has a close personal relationship, or where

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it can be proven that the donor is not acting for the purpose of financial gain in order to prevent commercialisation. Particularly, in the absence of such a close relationship, adequate provisions in national law of the Member States shall be made, thus assuring the highest possible protection of living donors".

Action Plan on Organ Donation and Transplantation (2009-2015)

In a separate own-initiative report by Andres Perello Rodriguez (S&D, ES), MEPs welcome a Commission Action Plan on organ donation and stress that swapping information and best practice among Member States will help countries with low organ availability to improve their donation rates. The appointment of transplant donor coordinators is a key step towards improving donor detection and organ donation rates, says the draft report.

MEPs urge Member States to consider using schemes whereby citizens are given the option of joining a donor register when applying for a passport or driving licence and to consider offering on-line enrolment in national or European donors' registers. Member States are also asked to include references on national identity cards or driving licences identifying the holder as an organ donor.

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