

Live organ donors a possibility

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Australian health administrators are considering preparing organ donors for transplants while they are still alive, it was reported Sunday.

The Sunday Age said the Australian Health Ethics Committee is seeking to extend transplant preparations to living patients who are certain to die when the heart and circulation stop. Currently, only brain-dead patients are prepared for organ transplants.

New procedures would involve inserting tubes into major arteries to prepare for cleansing of organs after death, blood tests and administering drugs to better preserve organs.

AECH spokesman Peter Joseph said extending the procedures to living patients was necessary to preserve solid organs such as hearts, livers, lungs and kidneys that deteriorated quickly after loss of circulation. He said it was possible someone could be aware they were being prepared for harvesting, but this would not be done without the permission of the donor or the family.

Ray Campbell, a university lecturer in medical ethics and head of the Queensland Bioethics Center, said he was concerned the changes could spur some doctors to physicians to hasten patients' deaths.

"Any attempt to water down our current definition of death should be resisted," he said.

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