

More than 2 million years of life saved with organ transplants, experts estimate

January 28 2015



But shortage of donors keeps doctors from helping more patients, researchers say.

(HealthDay)—Organ transplants have saved more than 2 million years of life in the United States over 25 years, new research shows.

But less than half of the people who needed a transplant in that time period got one, according to a report published in the Jan. 28 online edition of the journal *JAMA Surgery*.

"The critical shortage of donors continues to hamper this field: only 47.9 percent of patients on the waiting list during the 25-year study period underwent a transplant. The need is increasing: therefore, [organ donation](#) must increase," Dr. Abbas Rana, of the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, and colleagues wrote.

The researchers analyzed the medical records of more than 530,000

people who received organ transplants between 1987 and 2012, and of almost 580,000 people who were placed on a waiting list but never received a transplant.

During that time, transplants saved about 2.2 million years of life, with an average of slightly more than four years of life saved for every person who received an organ transplant, the study authors pointed out in a journal news release.

The number of years of life saved by type of organ transplant were: kidney, 1.3 million years; liver, more than 460,000; heart, almost 270,000; lung, close to 65,000; pancreas-kidney, almost 80,000; pancreas, just under 15,000; and intestine, about 4,500.

One expert noted the relevance of the findings.

"This study highlights the importance of organ donation and shows that solid-[organ transplants](#) save lives. One [organ donor](#) can impact as many as 50 lives," said Dr. Kareem Abu-Elmagd, director of Cleveland Clinic's Transplant Center, in Ohio.

"The field of transplantation continues to look for ways to save more lives," Abu-Elmagd said. "For instance, the ex-vivo organ perfusion program at Cleveland Clinic has been studying perfusion technology to better preserve donor organs."

With perfusion technology, a machine pumps oxygen and a nutrient-enriched solution through the [donor organ](#) to prevent damage or deterioration of the organ before it is transplanted into a waiting patient, according to the Cleveland Clinic.

The Baylor researchers suggested a straightforward solution.

"We call for deepened support of solid-organ [transplant](#) and donation—worthy endeavors with a remarkable record of achievement and a tremendous potential to do even more good for humankind in the future," the study authors concluded.

More information: The United Network for Organ Sharing has more about [organ transplantation](#).

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Citation: More than 2 million years of life saved with organ transplants, experts estimate (2015, January 28) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-01-million-years-life-transplants-experts.html>

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