

# Potential number of organ donors after euthanasia in Belgium

April 11 2017

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An estimated 10 percent of all patients undergoing euthanasia in Belgium could potentially donate at least one organ, according to a study published by *JAMA*.

The practice of [organ donation](#) after [euthanasia](#) is controversial and currently only allowed in Belgium and the Netherlands. It requires [patients](#) to undergo euthanasia in the hospital, and organ donation is performed after circulatory death. Donation after euthanasia could potentially help ease the shortage of organs for transplantation. It is unknown how many of these patients would be medically suitable to donate organs. Jan Bollen, L.L.M., M.D., of Maastricht University Medical Center, Maastricht, the Netherlands, and colleagues calculated the number of potential organ donors among persons undergoing euthanasia by excluding patients because of certain criteria (age, [medical condition](#)).

In 2015, 2,023 patients underwent euthanasia in Belgium and 1,288 people were on the Belgian organ transplantation waiting list. The researchers found that an estimated maximum of 10 percent of all patients undergoing euthanasia could potentially donate at least one organ, with 684 organs potentially available for donation. In 2015, 260 deceased [donor kidneys](#) were donated; if 400 kidneys were donated by patients undergoing euthanasia, the potential number of kidneys available for donation could more than double.

The authors note that medical suitability only implies that a patient is a

possible organ donor. "Whether the patient is also willing to donate, and is willing to die in hospital, must be carefully ascertained."

"Even if only a small percentage of the patients undergoing euthanasia donated an organ, donation after euthanasia could potentially help reduce the waitlists for organ donation. Nevertheless, it is essential that the primary goal of organ donation after euthanasia remains the same as for any patient donating an organ—to enable patients to carry out their last will of donating organs to help other people, after their own death."

**More information:** *JAMA* (2017). [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2017.0729](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2017.0729)

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