

Potential liver recipients may have new option

5 June 2015



Organs harvested after cardiac death appear safe, effective, study says.

(HealthDay)—Livers from donors who suffered cardiac death can be safely and effectively transplanted into patients dying of liver cancer, a new study suggests.

A [liver transplant](#) can cure many liver cancer [patients](#), but many die waiting for a liver because most transplant centers use only livers from brain-dead donors. This study tested livers from both brain-dead donors and donors after [cardiac death](#).

Cardiac death does not mean death from heart attack. Because of damaging oxygen loss, someone who dies from a [heart attack](#) is not considered a viable [donor](#) of organs for transplantation, the researchers said. Instead, cardiac death is controlled in a patient who will donate organs, they explained.

"This can occur, for example, in a patient who has had a bad brain injury and will not recover," said lead investigator and transplant surgeon Dr. Kristopher Croome, from the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Fla.

"In this controlled setting, with the purpose of donating organs, a patient is taken off life support,

and will pass into death. Then after a short time period, the organs will be recovered and donated," he said in a Mayo news release.

This study included 397 liver cancer patients who received a new liver—340 livers came from brain—dead donors and 57 came from people who donated after cardiac death.

Liver cancer recurred in about 12 percent of patients in both groups, according to the researchers.

"I believe this study firmly and finally answers the question as to whether liver donations after cardiac death are as viable for patients with [liver cancer](#) as livers from donors who die from brain death. They are," said Croome.

Using livers from donors who've suffered cardiac death could increase the number of transplants by 10 to 15 percent nationwide, according to Croome.

"The gap between patients who need a new [liver](#) and the number of organs available has been widening, but the use of donations after cardiac death could potentially alleviate some of the organ shortage," he said.

The study was published online recently in the *American Journal of Transplantation*.

More information: The American Liver Foundation has more about [liver transplantation](#).

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APA citation: Potential liver recipients may have new option (2015, June 5) retrieved 12 November 2019 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-06-potential-liver-recipients-option.html>

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