

# Getting more to donate organs

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** There were only 25 organ donors last year. That is why health authorities are planning to spend RM2 million this year to get more people to pledge their organs.

The National Transplant Resource Centre is planning to revamp its call centre to make it easier for donors to contact it, said its chief transplant co-ordinator, Datin Dr Lela Yasmin Mansor.

It is also recruiting additional staff.

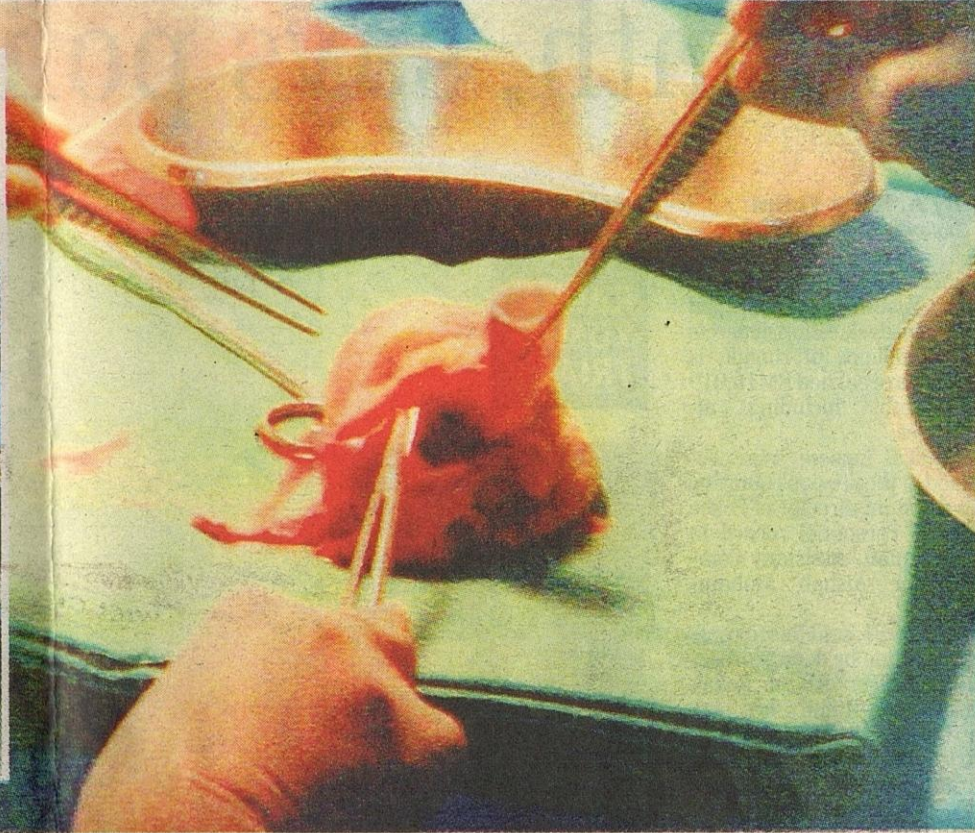
There are plans to employ a director of promotions and a director of communications.

Dr Lela said the centre would also place advertisements on organ donation to create greater awareness of its importance.

"We will also be going to schools to educate children on organ donation.

"With the co-operation of the Education Ministry, we plan to hold competitions to gauge their perceptions and views on the donation of organs," she told the *New Straits Times*.

Dr Lela said information kits on organ donation would be prepared for distribution to school-children



Harvesting a heart valve at the heart valve bank of the National Heart Institute. (Inset) An employee showing the stored heart valves.

and adults. Last year, the authorities harvested three hearts, five livers, two lungs, eight heart valves, 16 corneas and five bones from 25 brain-dead patients.

In 2006, there were also 25 organ donors who donated 13 kidneys, a heart, six livers, a lung, 16 heart valves, 19 corneas, three skin implants and six bones.

Between 1976 and last year, 206 people donated 435 organs and tissues.

Kuala Lumpur Hospital Nephrology Department head Dr Ghazali Ahmad said there was a need for a dedicated full-time national co-ordinating organ transplant team for the programme to be successful. At present, those on the team are volunteers.

"Their weekends are spent going around holding talks, workshops and group sessions with

community leaders and the public on organ donation.

"They even try to get the families of organ donors to speak on why they decided to donate the organs of their loved ones."

He said when there were organ donors, these volunteers swung into action by going to the hospitals to harvest the organs and bringing them back.

Often, it was the same surgeons who performed the transplants.

"These are dedicated people who sacrifice being with their families to promote and do organ transplants to save lives," said Dr Ghazali, adding that it was not easy for them as they had other jobs to do in hospitals.

The *New Straits Times* also learnt that the records of patients on the waiting list were not regularly updated, making it difficult to contact them.

HARVEST OF ORGANS		
	2007 (from 25 brain-dead patients)	2006
Heart	3	1
Liver	5	6
Lung	2	1
Heart valve	8	16
Cornea	16	19
Bone	5	6
Skin	-	3
Kidney	-	13



# Crucial role of homograft banks

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Besides direct organ transplants from brain-dead patients, selected hospitals have homograft banks where, for example, heart valves, corneas, certain tissues and bones are kept for use when the need arises.

Since 1992, the National Heart Institute (IJN) has had a homograft valve bank following requests from cardiac surgeons for quality-controlled, cryo-preserved heart valve homografts.

Homografts are tissues extracted from one species and implanted into a member of the same species.

In the case of cardiac homografts, the tissues are the aorta with the aortic valve and the anterior mitral valve leaflet; the main pulmonary artery, including the first few centimetres of the branch pulmonary arteries, and the pulmonary valve.

"The homografts are for patients with various cardiac diseases. In the majority of these cases, the outcome has been excellent. Before, all the homografts were flown in from tissue banks overseas," said head of the IJN Department of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care Unit, Datuk Dr Syed Abdul Aziz Syed Zin.

Dr Syed Abdul Aziz said the



**Datuk Dr Syed Abdul Aziz Syed Zin says 110 patients have undergone homografts**

tissues were extracted from fresh cadavers and cryo-preserved for use in patients who need aortic valve replacements, or for the treatment of congenital heart diseases.

"IJN has successfully retrieved, prepared and implanted cardiac homografts in more than 110 patients.

"The homograft unit at IJN comprises cardiothoracic surgeons and perfusionists/medical technicians who are involved in retrieving, processing and cryo-preserving homograft tissues for storage," he said, adding that children particularly, can benefit from homografts, where the need for small-sized prostheses and freedom from anti-coagulants are critical.

## What it takes to be an organ donor

**Q: Who can be a donor?**

**A:** Anyone, young or old, can sign up to be a donor. But anyone below 18 years old needs parental or guardian consent.

**Q: What is organ donation?**

**A:** It is the gift of one's body parts after death for the purpose of replacing diseased or defective organs and tissues with healthy ones. Organ and tissue donation is the ultimate humanitarian act of charity.

**Q: What organs and tissues can be**

**donated by a person?**

**A:** Commonly transplanted organs are kidneys, heart, liver, lungs and pancreas, while transplantable tissues are eyes, bone, skin and heart valves. Thus, a single donor can save the lives of a number of people.

**Q: When are the organs and tissues removed?**

**A:** Only when death has been confirmed by two registered doctors. The doctors who certify the death are not involved in the transplant

operation at all.

**Q: Will my hospital treatment be affected if they know I am a donor?**

**A:** Absolutely not. Only after all ways and means to save your life have been exhausted will the question of organ and tissue donation be discussed with your relatives.

For further information, contact: The National Transplant Resource Centre, Hospital Kuala Lumpur at 03-26155555 ext 6576 (Hospital Kuala Lumpur) or 03-26942705.