

General Studies-2; Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Organ Transplantation in India

1) Introduction

- Recently organ transplant irregularities were found in Tamil Nadu.
- International patients were given priority in transplants, bypassing long list of Indians.
- In 2017, foreigners got about 25% of all heart transplants in the State and 33% of lung transplants.
- Hearts and lungs harvested from brain-dead patients were given to foreign nationals admitted to corporate hospitals.

2) Protocol of organ transplant

- The protocol is that an organ should first be offered to an Indian.
- If no Indian is available, an NRI should be considered.
- The question of an international patient arises only when both decline an organ offer.
- Allocation of organs to recipients is based on criteria that include the date of registration and the medical condition of the recipient.
- The wealth, race or gender of a person has no bearing when a person is receiving a donated organ.

3) Concerns / Challenges

- Hospitals have become so greedy that they don't bother to help poor Indian patients.
- There are also allegations that organs were harvested without the consent of a brain-dead patient's family to meet the needs of foreign nationals.
- The cost of a transplant, especially a heart transplant, in Chennai is so high that only foreigners are able to afford it.
- Problem of organ trafficking.
- WHO states that the sale of organs violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- The growing disparity between the rich and poor and demand for human organs makes the trading of organs a quick means to riches for some and a relief for others.
- Organ trade leads to exploitation of the poverty-stricken people by tempting them with financial gains.

4) Low Organ Donation

- Each year hundreds of Indians die while waiting for an organ transplant.
- Acute imbalance between the number of organs donated and the number of people waiting for a transplant.
- Finding a donor is the main issue in the country.
- Lack of awareness and improper infrastructure facilities.
- Administrative hurdles and conservative mindset further affect organ transplantation.
- Lack of a centralized registry for organ donation.
- India has low count of organ donors per million people compared to U.S, Spain, and Australia.
- Myths associated with organ donation which needs to be addressed.

5) Way Forward

- Strict action against Hospitals and professionals who engage in commerce or unethical behaviour.

- Arrangements to air-lift organs, since domestic patients are unable to afford flight facilities.
- Such measures will make it possible to utilise more hearts and lungs, and offer them to domestic recipients.
- Bringing transparency in the organ transplantation programme to ensure that all Indian patients deserving an organ get it.
- Strict guidelines for allocation of organs to foreigners.
- Enrolling all domestic patients through State registries should be the priority for the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation.
- Post-transplant data on follow-ups and outcome of transplants for every recipient must be compiled.
- Enhanced awareness among people is needed to encourage people to donate organs.
- This requires involvement of the civil society, religious leaders and other stakeholders in creating awareness.

6) Facts for Prelims

- **National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO)**
 - a. NOTTO functions under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.
 - b. It is an all-India apex body for coordination and networking for procurement and distribution of organs/tissues and transplantation.
- Tamil Nadu tops in organ transplantation in the country.
- The Transplantation of Human Organs Act of 1994 makes it illegal to buy or sell human organs in India.
- Priority for citizens enrolled in the State and national waiting lists over foreign nationals is laid down in the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules.
- Health is a State subject; Centre can only frame national guidelines. States should implement the guidelines.
- Organs that have been successfully transplanted include the heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, pancreas, intestine, and thymus.
- Tissues include bones, tendons, corneae, skin, heart valves, nerves and veins.
- Worldwide, the kidneys are the most commonly transplanted organs, followed by the liver and then the heart.
- Organ donors may be living, brain dead, or dead via circulatory death.
- Unlike organs, most tissues (with the exception of corneas) can be preserved and stored for up to five years.
- Anyone from a child to an elderly person can be a donor.