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2009 : October 2009 - Emerging Research Fronts : Ellen Sheehy Discusses the Shortage of Organ Donors

**EMERGING RESEARCH FRONTS - 2009**

October 2009



**Ellen Sheehy talks with ScienceWatch.com and answers a few questions about this month's Emerging Research Front Paper in the field of Economics & Business.**



**Article: Estimating the number of potential organ donors in the United States**

Authors: Sheehy, E; Conrad, SL; Brigham, LE; Luskin, R; Weber, P; Eakin, M; Schkade, L; Hunsicker, L  
 Journal: N ENGL J MED, 349 (7): 667-674, AUG 14 2003  
 Addresses: Assoc Organ Procurement Org, 1364 Beverly Rd, Suite 100, Mclean, VA 22101 USA.  
 Assoc Organ Procurement Org, Mclean, VA 22101 USA.  
 Univ Iowa, Iowa Donor Network, Iowa City, IA USA.  
 Washington Reg Transplant Consortium, Falls Church, VA USA.  
 (addresses have been truncated.)

**SW: Why do you think your paper is highly cited?**

Our paper represents an important contribution to the field of organ donation in that it provided a credible estimate of the size of the brain-dead organ donor pool in the United States based on the gold standard methodology, review of hospital charts, from a large sample of 30+ organ procurement organizations. Understanding how many potential donors exist on an annual basis is critical to assessing system performance and developing strategies for improvement.

**SW: Does it describe a new discovery, methodology, or synthesis of knowledge?**

We used a proven methodology, but were able to gather data from a much broader sample than previous studies.

**SW: Would you summarize the significance of your paper in layman's terms?**

In addition to estimating the size of the potential donor pool (from brain-dead donors), we also showed that the majority of potential donors are in a small fraction of all US hospitals, which has important implications for focusing organ procurement organization efforts to educate regarding donation.

**SW: How did you become involved in this research and were any particular problems encountered along the way?**

I have been working to increase the supply of organ donors for more than 15 years. It was a privilege to coordinate this multi-site study that involved the cooperation and efforts of 35 organ procurement organizations across the country.

**SW: Where do you see your research leading in the future?**

Questions remain regarding whether the supply of brain-dead donors is being

*"It was a privilege to coordinate this multi-site study that involved the cooperation and efforts of 35 organ procurement organizations across the country."*

affected by changes in clinical practice surrounding end-of-life care and brain death declaration. In addition, to date there has been no similar methodology to estimate the size of the pool of potential donors who are not declared brain-dead, rather eligible as donors after cardiac death. Developing this methodology will be extremely difficult and will require input from numerous clinical experts.

**SW: Do you foresee any social or political implications for your research?**

Our estimates do suggest that the current waiting lists for organs are not likely to be satisfied with the existing supply of brain-dead organ donors.

**Ellen Sheehy, M.P.P.M., M.A.R.**

**Independent Consultant**

**Newtown, MA, USA**

KEYWORDS: SOLID ORGANS; PROCUREMENT; TRANSPLANTATION; DONATION; POOL.



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