

Kin agree to donate brain-dead man's organs

First transplants set under revised consent terms

By NATSUKO FUKUE

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The family of a man left brain dead from a traffic accident agreed to donate his organs in the first such case under the revised transplant law, saying that although he hadn't consented in writing, he had voiced such wishes, a transplant group said Monday.

According to the family, "he told them in a conversation he hoped to donate organs so the family decided to respect his will," Setsuko Konaka, director of the Japan Organ Transplant Network, said at a news conference.

"In the past, there were family members who wanted organs of relatives to be transplanted because the patient had verbally expressed that will. But they couldn't (because it was before the legal revision). So this is a step forward," Konaka said.

The man, who was in his 20s, was officially declared brain dead at a hospital in the Kanto-Koshinetsu region at 11:55 a.m. Monday, according to the network.

Konaka said the man was involved in a traffic accident, and doctors at the hospital established that he was brain dead before he was legally certified as such with the permission of the family. Details of the location were not provided as per the family's wishes, she said.

The network received notice about the donor last Thursday. The family members decided Sunday to consent to donating the organs after discussing it among themselves for three days.

A transplant coordinator met with the man's family on Thursday. The coordinator explained about donating organs, including the revision of the transplant law and brain death. It took about an hour to an hour and a half for the process, which is generally the case, Konaka said.

"The family didn't reach the conclusion right after the talk with our coordinator," she said.

The network said the man's heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, pancreas and eyeballs will be donated.

Recipients have been chosen from among people on a waiting list who are deemed to be in the most dire need.

According to the network, a man in his 20s is to receive the donor's heart at National Cerebral and Cardiovascular Center in Osaka Prefecture. His lungs will be donated to a man in his 20s at Okayama University Hospital, and the liver will go to a woman in her 60s at University of Tokyo Hospital, the network said.

A teenage boy in Gunma University Hospital will receive a kidney, while the other kidney and pancreas will be used for a woman in her 50s at Fujita Health University Hospital in Nagoya, the group said.

The organ transplant law, when it first took effect in 1997, required a donor to be at least 15 years old and express a clear wish to donate in writing.

The first organ transplant under the law was performed using organs donated from a woman pronounced brain dead at a hospital in Kochi Prefecture in 1999.

The law was revised in July 2009 to ease conditions for organ donations from brain-dead donors with the aim of increasing donors.

Under the revised law, which took effect July 17 this year, donations are possible with the consent of the family unless the individual whose organs are to be harvested has left instructions opposing being a donor.

An intention to donate one's organs may now be expressed by anyone regardless of age and remain valid even if not made in writing. Guidelines on the law state that such a wish may be expressed on a donor card or affirmed by family members.

Information from Kyodo added

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