

90% of organ donations made with family consent

The Yomiuri Shimbun Nearly 90 percent of organ donations from brain-dead donors have been carried out even though the donors' will was unclear since the revised Organ Transplant Law was enforced three years ago.

The donations were carried out based on the consent of donors' families.

The number of organ donations from both children and adults in cases of brain death has increased since the law's enforcement in 2010.

The main factor in the increase is that the law has enabled organs to be harvested with families' consent even when brain-dead patients did not specify their willingness to donate organs.

Out of 63 cases following the revision, 56 cases, or nearly 90 percent, were donations obtained via the consent of patients' families, according to a Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry study council.

Organ donation becomes an option after cardiac death as well as after brain death, but the number of transplants after cardiac death has decreased. As a result, the combined number of organ donations has almost remained unchanged since around 2006.

Donors and patients' families who had previously been considering organ donation after cardiac death shifted to the idea of donating after brain death, so the number of donors itself has not increased, observers said.

Some medical institutions have been putting a new emphasis on organ donations.

St. Marianna University School of Medicine Hospital in Kawasaki started providing medical transplantation support services in 2008.

The hospital's neurosurgeons are proactive in explaining to patients' families about the option of donating organs, as they understand the situation that families face.

The number of patients on organ transplant waiting lists was more than 13,000 as of the end of May, according to Japan Organ Transplant Network.

"It's important for ordinary citizens as well as medical care providers to gain an understanding of organ transplantation. I want schools also to take up the subject and provide [students] with opportunities to think about the sanctity of life," said Yoshiko Kaminaga, chairman of an organization serving children with heart disease.