

Surgical Education

Surgical resident perspective on deceased donor organ procurement



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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Deceased donor organ procurement provides unparalleled opportunity for surgical residents with extensive surgical exposure. We hypothesize that surgical residents regard organ donation positively and organ procurement enhances their education.

METHODS: We conducted an institutional review board approved anonymous national survey to evaluate organ procurement experiences and attitudes of general surgical residents.

RESULTS: Three hundred ninety-seven residents representing all postgraduate years responded, with 97% completion rate. Organ procurement increased with training level (92% seniors vs 53% interns). Over 85% agree organ procurement is a good educational and operative experience, and 73% believe that it will benefit their future surgical career. About 68% agree that organ procurement provided knowledge of anatomy and exposures; under 10% felt organ procurement could be duplicated with simulation. Presence of transplant program did not affect attitudes or experience. Eighty-eight percent women versus 77% men plan to donate their own organs.

CONCLUSION: Results indicate that surgical residents value organ procurement, and it remains an essential encounter that applies to general surgery.

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As surgical training becomes more time limited, focus should be centered on maximizing resident benefit from every single operative experience. Deceased donor organ procurement provides a unique opportunity in many ways. The operation itself is extensive, with an expansive lesson in anatomy not provided in any other setting.^{1,2} The exposures and techniques used in procurement may be of significant help in operations and surgical disciplines other than transplantation.^{1,3} The potential for increased operative experience at an earlier stage in training clearly exists during procurement. In addition, the chance to learn to work

closely and simultaneously with other surgical teams is not a frequent occurrence in general surgery.

At this time, there is active debate regarding the need for a transplant surgery rotation as part of general surgical training.⁴ Although the extent and applicability of the organ procurement experience both educationally and surgically are not surprising to most who have participated, this concept has not been extensively studied or quantified. In addition, there is little in the literature regarding surgical residents' attitudes toward organ donation overall, despite their active involvement in the process.^{5,6}

Methods

The 23-question anonymous survey was administered through Survey Monkey (Fig. 1). Distribution of the survey was done by the US general surgery program directors, who

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Survey questions & answers

What clinical post-graduate year are you at present? 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

What is your gender? Male/female

What area of the country is your residency program in?

Northeast/southeast/southwest/midwest/west

What is your race? Caucasian/African-American/Hispanic/other

How many organ procurements have you participated in during residency? 0, 1, 2-5, 6-10, >10

Did you participate in organ procurements prior to residency? 0, 1, 2-5, 6-10, >10

Is there a transplant program at your residency? yes/no

If there is a transplant program at your residency have you rotated on that service?

yes/no

Evaluate the following with a 5-point Likert scale

organ procurement is a good educational experience

organ procurement is a good operative experience

organ procurement can be duplicated using a simulation model

organ procurement can be duplicated with other currently performed operations

organ procurement has provided me with knowledge of anatomy & exposures

organ procurement has impacted the way I approach other operations

Do you have any ethical concerns regarding organ procurement? yes/no

Do you have any religious concerns regarding organ procurement? yes/no

Do you have any negative associations regarding organ procurement? yes/no

I have agreed to be an organ donor on my license yes/no

I plan to give permission for donation of my organs yes/no

Evaluate the following with a 5-point Likert scale

I would donate a relative's organs if the decision were mine to make

I would consider living donation for a known recipient

I would consider non-directed live donation

I would accept a transplant if necessary from a deceased donor

I would accept a transplant if necessary from a living donor

Do you have a personal relationship with an organ donor or recipient? yes/no

Evaluate the following with a 5-point Likert scale

my organ procurement experience during residency will positively benefit my future career as a surgeon

Would you like more exposure to organ procurement? yes/no

What can be done to improve the resident organ procurement experience?

Figure 1 The 23 question survey and answer choices.

were sent the link electronically and were asked to forward it to their residents. Answers were multiple choice or evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Opportunity for additional comment was provided for each answer. Prior to national distribution, the questionnaire was validated by a group of surgeons and a pilot study at a single institution. The study and survey were institutional review board

approved. Statistical analysis was performed using unpaired *t* test.

Results

Three hundred ninety-seven residents responded to the survey, with a 97% completion rate. Assuming all program directors distributed the survey, this represents a 7% response rate. All postgraduate years are represented, with each year comprising 13% to 25% of the population (Fig. 2). The sex breakdown is roughly equal, with 57% men and 43% women. Self-reported race demonstrates 76% Caucasian, 4% African American, 3% Hispanic, and 17% other. All regions of the United States are represented, but the southwest only comprises 4%. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents have already rotated on the transplant service.

Fifty-eight percent have not yet attended organ procurement during residency, but 23% did prior to residency (Fig. 3). A total of 29% have never participated in organ procurement. Organ procurement involvement correlated with postgraduate year, with 100% of the chiefs having participated during residency.

Over 80% of all respondents, and 100% of those with experience (organ procurement ≥ 1), agree or strongly agree that organ procurement is both a good educational and operative experience (Table 1). Each senior resident considers procurement to have provided knowledge of anatomy and exposures; only one feels that procurement did not impact his approach to other operations. Most of those with neutral opinion on this question have not yet had experience, and only 22% would not like more experience. In fact, 60% of those who have already done over 10 want further opportunity to participate. Seventy-three percent of respondents believe their future careers will benefit from their procurement experience. Of those who have done organ procurement, only 6% disagree that the experience will positively benefit their future as a surgeon. There is a clear association between experience and perceived impact on future career. Regardless of sex and race, residents feel that organ procurement is a valuable experience, both technically and educationally. Few residents believe that the organ procurement experience can be duplicated with either simulation or another currently performed operation.

Over 70% of respondents are interested in donation, and the majority would donate a relative's organs if the decision were theirs to make (Table 1). Seventy-six percent would consider live donation for a known recipient, and 23% would entertain altruistic donation. Experience does not correlate with willingness to donate.

Seventy-eight percent of men and 88% of women report plans to donate their organs (*P* = .01). Remarkably, 77% of both men and women have signed donor cards. Although nearly all the men have indicated their wishes with a signed donor card, a number of the women who profess interest in organ donation do not yet have signed donor cards.

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