



Council of Europe Black Sea Area Project: International Cooperation for the Development of Activities Related to Donation and Transplantation of Organs in the Region

E. Arredondo^a, M. López-Fraga^{b,*}, E. Chatzixiros^c, B. Senemaud^d, P. Brezovsky^e, C. Carella^c, C. Ballesté^a, A. Aydin Mehmet^f, G. Tomadze^g, I. Codreanu^h, A.A. Sarkissianⁱ, M. Simeonova^j, A. Nikonenko^k, V. Zota^l, M.P. Gómez^a, M. Manyalich^a, C. Bolotinha^m, A. Franca^m, A.N. Costa^c, M.-O. Ott^b, and K.-H. Buchheit^b

^aDonation and Transplantation Institute (DTI) Foundation, Barcelona, Spain; ^bEuropean Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM), Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France; ^cCentro Nazionale Trapianti (CNT), Rome, Italy; ^dAgence de la Biomédecine, Saint Denis, France; ^eKoordináční středisko transplantací, Prague, Czech Republic; ^fMinistry of Health of Turkey, Ankara, Turkey; ^gTransplantation Organisation of Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia; ^hTransplant Agency of Moldova, Chisinau, Moldova; ⁱArabkir Joint Medical Centre, Yerevan, Armenia; ^jThe Bulgarian Executive Agency for Transplantation, Sofia, Bulgaria; ^kMinistry of Health of Ukraine, Kiev, Ukraine; ^lNational Transplantation Agency of Romania, Bucharest, Romania; ^mAutoridade para os Serviços de Sangue e da Transplantação, Lisbon, Portugal

ABSTRACT

Background. In 2011, the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & Healthcare of the Council of Europe launched a 3-year collaborative project to address the organ shortage and improve access to transplant health services in Council of Europe member states in the Black Sea area (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation) through the development of safe and ethical donation and transplantation programs.

Objective. Support the development of donation and transplantation programs through close interstate cooperation between national health organizations and relevant stakeholders.

Methodology. Several work packages (WP) were established: WP1, project coordination (European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & Healthcare); WP2, development and implementation of an effective legislative and financial framework (Czech Republic and France); WP3, establishment of National Transplant Authorities (Italy and Portugal); and WP4, clinical practices (DTI Foundation). Data collection, surveys, and expert visits allowed for the collection of first-hand information from each participant country at national, regional, and hospital levels.

Results. Data analysis showed the positive impact of the project represented by a tendency to increase the total donation rates (per million people) in the participant countries (2011 vs 2013): Azerbaijan, +7.3; Armenia, -0.7; Georgia, +3.3; Bulgaria, +0.9; Moldova, +2.5; Ukraine, +0.8; Romania, +2.3; and Turkey, +2.7.

The Black Sea Area (BSA) project was possible thanks to funding from the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM), a Directorate of the Council of Europe.

*Address correspondence to Marta López-Fraga, European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM), Council of Europe, 7, allée Kastner, F- 67081 Strasbourg, France. Phone: +33 (0)3 90 21 45 30. E-mail: marta.fraga@edqm.eu

0041-1345/18
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.transproceed.2017.12.043>

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230 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10169

Conclusions. Increases in total donation rates are the result of a number of initiatives in the Black Sea area, including the stepwise implementation of legislative, organizational and institutional country-specific recommendations tailored by the CoE, efforts of the respective Ministries of Health in each country and synergism with other European projects in the region. These countries should invest further in implementing the recommendations that emerged from this project to improve their organ donation and transplantation programs and progress toward self-sufficiency.

THE COUNCIL of Europe [1] (CoE) is an intergovernmental organization that covers, by virtue of its 47 member states, the entire European continent. Founded in 1949, the CoE promotes human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The work of the CoE in the area of organ transplantation started in the 1980s. In particular, activities based on blood transfusion and organ transplantation are managed by the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM), a directorate of the CoE. The EDQM is a leading organization that protects public health by supporting the development, implementation, and application of quality standards for medicines and health care.

The European Committee on Organ Transplantation (CD-P-TO) is the steering committee in charge of organ transplantation activities at the EDQM [2]. It actively promotes the noncommercialization of organ donation [3], fight against organ trafficking [4,5], and the development of ethical, quality, and safety standards in the transplantation of organs, tissues, and cells [6]. Its activities include the collection of international data and monitoring of practices in Europe, transfer of knowledge and expertise between organizations and experts through training and networking, and elaboration of reports, surveys, and recommendations.

In recent years, the CoE and the World Health Organisation began to implement projects that supported the development of a common and constructive attitude toward transplantation issues in various countries [7,8]. Efforts were mainly directed toward the development of effective legislative frameworks and the establishment of national transplant organizations (NTOs) and transplant programs [9].

PREVIOUS ORGAN DONATION AND TRANSPLANTATION INITIATIVES IN THE BLACK SEA AREA

Development of organ transplantation activities in the countries of the Black Sea area (BSA) began in the late 1970s; however, they began to decline in the early 1990s, and, later ceased in some countries. Therefore, the identification and sharing of experiences from countries with well-developed and established transplantation programs and local initiatives has become vital [10]. Such activities could provide models for the implementation of safe donation and transplantation programs in BSA countries according to their state of development and cultural backgrounds [11].

In 2004, the CoE and the European Commission agreed on a joint program for the Republic of Moldova that

focused on transplantation services and combatting organ trafficking. As a result, a new law on transplantation was adopted by the Moldovan Parliament in 2008, and a transplant organization was established that is now responsible for all organizational aspects in this field. After the Moldovan experience, it became evident that experiences from countries with well-developed and established transplantation programs should be shared, and that local initiatives could provide models for increasing transplantation activity as well as for the implementation of safety and quality programs throughout Europe [12].

THE BSA PROJECT

In 2011, the CoE launched a 3-year collaborative project to counteract organ shortages and improve access to health services related to transplantation in the BSA member states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation) through the development of safe and ethical donation and transplantation programs. The BSA project was based on the philosophy that CoE member states with established and successful transplantation systems would transfer their knowledge and experience to BSA countries with the support of the CoE, who would provide political and logistical support to the project. Efforts were directed mainly toward the development of effective legislative frameworks and the establishment of NTOs as well as national transplant programs and infrastructures. Transplant specialists from members of the CD-P-TO, namely France, Italy, the Czech Republic, Portugal, and Spain, participated and supported experts from BSA countries.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the project was to support the development of organ donation and transplantation programs through close interstate cooperation between national health organizations and relevant stakeholders.

The specific objectives of the project were to (a) structure and enhance the exchange of knowledge between the partners of the project, (b) ensure transfer of best available expertise and good practices in the field of transplantation between CoE member states, (c) review existing laws on transplantation of organs, tissues, and cells, and promote implementation of an effective legislative framework, (d) contribute to the establishment of national transplant authorities and national transplant programs where these

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