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***Organ transplantation as the method of treatment and saving life  
in the opinion of students***

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**Zagadnienia leczenia i ratowania życia przy pomocy przeszczepionych narządów  
w opinii młodzieży maturalnej**

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Organ transplantation is a new type of treatment, which requires numerous changes in a contemporary way of thinking. Despite good results and obvious benefits of this method, the number of transplants in Poland, as in the whole world, is smaller than the number of people in need. There are several reasons. One of them are very rare situations in which people agree to become organ donors after death [1]. The Law of 06.12.1995 /Journal of Law No 138 pos. 682/ regulates the rules according to which organs can be taken from people. However, the Law does not solve the problem of social awareness.

Science and technology development is continuously progressing, not taking interest in whether people are prepared enough for living with it and its consequences. The aspects of dying and death still remain taboo issues. Therefore, still young transplant surgery and its growing demand for 'useful organs', has unintentionally entered a delicate and tension-provoking sphere [2]. The activity of this surgery branch requires exceptional efforts: medical, organisational, ethical, legal, psychological, financial and educational. The feeling of gratitude of the people who feel saved by a 'new organ' is accompanied by many people's concern that what has been developing is a not clear enough culture of dealing with dead people.

Transplantation techniques have a long medical history [3]. The beginnings reach the Renaissance, when there were cases of treating soldiers' wounds by filling the missing body parts with skin fragments. The news of the successful heart transplantation performed on 02.12.1967 by dr Christian Barnard came as a shock for the entire world. Since that time transplant medicine has been intensively developing. Nowadays, such organs as heart, kidneys, liver, pancreas, intestines, bone marrow and cornea are successfully transplanted. A dead person can save lives of six other people [4]. In 2003, 1300 organ transplantations from dead donors were performed, which is about 10% more than in 2001, but still not enough comparing to the number of the people in need.

People's attitudes towards death vary, they result not only from one's personal experiences, temperament and personality, but mostly are a consequence of a certain type of philosophy. 'A human is not merely the body. It is important how we remember the person, the feeling he/she had for us and aroused in us', claims an ethicist professor Jacek Hołówka, the Institute of Philosophy of Warsaw University. For a man there always exist the perspective of death, which one can accept inside or reject. The fact of death becomes a problem, which cannot be removed from one's consciousness, and thus, each person feels the need to take a specified attitude towards this issue.

Numerous surveys carried out by the Public Opinion Research Centre were to analyse Poles' opinions concerning treatment and saving people's lives by means of organ transplantation. The results

show that we have accepted, the so called Human Organ Transplants Act of 1995, though the surveys present a better picture than the reality. In the table presenting the number of transplants in Europe, Poland is ranked one of the last positions, in the Organ Donor Registry there are currently 22027 names of the people who object to the removal of organs for transplantation.

Transplant surgery deals with donors, who are reasonably healthy at the moment of death, this is an important condition from a medical point of view due to the fact that organs taken from a dead body should be in a 'good' physiological state [5]. Because of that, usually young people who fall victim to a sudden death are taken into consideration as potential donors. No one is psychologically prepared for such a kind of death. For relatives, a sudden death is a great shock, any attempt of resuscitation gives a spark of hope. In the face of death, especially sudden, family members think only about the relative who has just passed away, not about strangers, unknown people who can be saved by organ transplantation. For that reason, social awareness of the needs and profits arising from transplantation and legal regulations are particularly important. It seems legal aspects have been already settled, though social maturity still remains far from being satisfactory. The existence of a psychological-social barrier requires plenty of systematic work in the field of making people, especially the young, realise the situation [6].

The aim of this study is to try to answer the following questions:

- ⇒ Is the problem of saving lives by means of organ transplantation the subject of discussion in Polish families?
- ⇒ Does the presence of a person with a chronic disease in a family influence the attitude towards this kind of treatment?
- ⇒ Do all the citizens know that if they do not want to be organ donors, they should inform the relatives about their decision or send an objection form to the Organ Donor Registry?

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INVESTIGATED GROUP

The students of 3 classes from Liceum Ogólnokształcące no 10 in Gdańsk were involved in the research. The presented material shows information based on 100 students preparing for the school-leaving exam, among which there were 58 women and 42 men.

#### METHODS

Out of an extensive range of research methods, the one chosen for this study is a diagnostic opinion poll since it is an effective way of gathering information about the dynamics of social phenomena. The research technique is a survey and the survey questionnaire constitutes the analysis tool. Beside the survey questionnaire, there is also a supplementary method, a interview, which usually functions as the way of getting to know people's opinions and their problems [7]. The interview was treated as a free conversation, in which questions planned beforehand were related to the sources of information concerning transplantology. The material gathered was subject to statistical and descriptive analysis. The significance of differences between the features analysed were checked by means of the  $X^2$  test [8].

#### RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis of the respondents' statements shows a considerable difference between a general acceptance of transplantations as the way of saving lives and the respondents' attitude towards more detailed issues. The question: Do you support the idea of organ transplantation as the way of saving lives? – was answered affirmatively by 62%, negatively by 12% and 2% of the respondents could not specify their opinion. This is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:**

No	Question no 1: Do you support the idea of organ transplantation as the way of saving lives?	Number of people					
		Women		Men		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
1	Yes	8	8	21	21	29	29
2	No	28	28	10	10	38	38
3	I have no opinion	22	22	11	11	33	33

However the question concerning the respondents' potential consent to become organ donors after death was answered affirmatively by only 29 people, 38 people, mostly women, were against, 33 people gave the 'I do not know' answer. The above figures are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:**

No	Question no 7: Do you agree to become an organ donor for chronically ill people after your death?	Number of people					
		Women		Men		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
1.	Yes	5	5	24	24	29	29
2.	No	31	31	7	7	38	38
3.	I have no opinion	22	22	11	11	33	33

Statistical analysis of the collected material has confirmed a relationship between sex and the lack of consent to become an organ donor after death. The obtained results showed that in fact women more often express their objection against giving organs after death to chronically ill people. ( $p>0,05$ ). The research revealed a strong relationship between the presence of a chronically ill person in a respondent's family and the degree of acceptance to organ transplantation. All the respondents – 19 people who had chronically ill relatives possess large amount of knowledge about transplantations and declare a general willingness to become organ donors.

A significant percentage of the young people investigated – 68% do not know a sign, a symbol of a voluntary organ donation; 12% draws it incorrectly; 20% of the respondents know the symbol well. No statistically significant relationship between sex and the above issue has been observed ( $p<0,05$ ).

As far as the question: In the case of a sudden death of a close relative, would you agree their organs being taken for someone else? – most of the respondents, 52 people, had no opinion, 22 people gave the affirmative answer, 26 people did not agree. The situation is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

No	Question no 8: In the case of a sudden death of a close relative, would you agree their organs being taken for someone else?	Number of people					
		Women		Men		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
1.	Yes	3	3	19	19	22	22
2.	No	18	18	8	8	26	26
3	I have no opinion	37	37	15	15	52	52

$X^2$  test, which was used to analyse the relationship between the respondents' sex and their statements concerning the potential consent to donating their close relatives' organs in the case of their sudden death has revealed that sex has no influence on the respondents' opinion about this problem. The obtained results showed that, in fact, women far more often ( $p>0,05$ ) express their objection towards the situation in which they would have to make a decision about donating a dead relative's organs to the people in need.

On the basis of these statements it is possible to draw the conclusion that it is easier for the respondents to agree to a general idea than to a situation involving them directly. It is also easier for the respondents to accept the organ transplantation idea applying to an indefinite future than being aware of such a situation affecting their closest relatives.

62% of the respondents, both male and female, stated they do not know their relatives' opinion concerning their consent to become organ donors. This is due to the fact that during family talks such topics are not discussed. Table 4 presents the above situation.

**Table 4**

No	Question no 4: Have you ever been in a situation when during a family meeting you got to know your relatives' opinions about organ transplantation or you ever expressed your view?	Number of people					
		Women		Men		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
1.	Yes	11	11	10	10	21	21
2.	No	33	33	29	29	62	62
3	I do not remember	14	14	3	3	17	17

Test  $X^2$ , used to analyse the relationship between the respondents' sex and their being familiar with relatives' opinions concerning the above matter has revealed that in this case sex has no influence over the issue analysed ( $p<0,05$ ).

## CONCLUSIONS

- ⇒ In Polish families such topics as transplants or potential donating one's organs after death are not discussed.
- ⇒ The respondents mostly agree that donating organs is a morally right thing to do. This general opinion, however, does not mean the people are ready to make such tough but highly commendable decisions concerning themselves.
- ⇒ Women more often than men do not agree to donate their cells, tissues or organs after death.
- ⇒ Women more often than men do not accept taking organs or cells from their close relatives, in the case of their sudden death.
- ⇒ The knowledge of transplantations is superficial, it is necessary to organise actions for rising public awareness about the idea of treatment by means of transplants.

## LITERATURE

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## STRESZCZENIE

Przeszczepianie narządów jest rodzajem leczenia, który wymaga szeregu zmian w dotychczasowym sposobie myślenia. Liczba przeszczepów w Polsce, tak jak na całym świecie, jest mniejsza od liczby potrzebujących. Celem niniejszej pracy jest zbadanie poziomu wiedzy młodzieży maturalnej na temat leczenia przy pomocy przeszczepianych narządów. Ponadto oceniono postawę wobec omawianego problemu. Badaniem objęto 100 uczniów klas maturalnych LO Nr10 w Gdańsku, 58 osób to kobiety, 42 osoby stanowią mężczyźni. Ankietowani wykazują zasadniczą zgodność co do tego, że ofiarowanie organów jest aktem moralnie słusznym. To generalne przekonanie nie niweluje jednak niegotowości do takich decyzji w stosunku do własnej osoby lub najbliższych członków rodziny. Analiza ankiet wskazuje na fakt, iż w polskich rodzinach nie rozmawia się o przeszczepach i ewentualnej zgodzie na ofiarowanie swoich organów w przypadku nagłej śmierci. Wiedza na temat transplantacji jest powierzchowna, konieczne jest przeprowadzenie akcji uświadamiających wśród młodzieży o idei przeszczepów.

## SUMMARY

Organ transplantation is a new type of treatment, which requires numerous changes in a contemporary way of thinking. Despite good results and obvious benefits of this method, the number of transplants in Poland, as in the whole world, is smaller than the number of people in need. The aim of the research is to analyse the level of knowledge among the students preparing for a school-leaving exam concerning treatment by means of organ transplantation. Moreover, the student's attitude towards the issue was evaluated. 100 people (58 women and 42 men), the students of Liceum Ogólnokształcące no 10 in Gdańsk preparing for school-leaving exam were involved in the research. The research technique chosen for this study is a diagnostic opinion poll whereas the survey questionnaire constitutes the analysis tool. The respondents mostly agree that donating organs is a morally right thing to do. This general opinion, however, does not mean the people are ready to make such tough but highly commendable decisions concerning themselves. The respondents' answers indicate that women more often than men do not agree to donate their cells, tissues or organs after death. Surveys analysis shows that in Polish families such topics as transplants or potential donating one's organs after death are not discussed. The knowledge of transplantations is superficial, it is necessary to organise actions for rising public awareness about the idea of treatment by means of transplants.