

# Standardizing the Process

*A look at the OPTN/UNOS pancreas transplantation committee*

BY KAREN SOKOHL

“Historically, OPOs across the country have been able to choose how they want to allocate the pancreas.”

Speaking was Elizabeth F. Sleeman, M.H.A., liaison to the OPTN/UNOS pancreas transplantation committee. She continued to explain that, for example, some OPOs might start with the combined kidney–pancreas waiting list and, once that is exhausted, move to the kidney alone and pancreas alone waiting lists. Others might first start with a kidney list, and then move to a pancreas alone or a shared list. And others might start with one list and switch to another in the middle of the allocation process.

“There’s been no consistency across the country,” Sleeman continued, “and policy doesn’t dictate that they choose a particular method.”

Chaired the last two years by Rainer W.G. Gruessner, M.D., chair of surgery at the University of Arizona in Tucson, the OPTN/UNOS pancreas committee is investigating a standardized national pancreas allocation system. Those efforts will continue under Dixon B. Kaufman, M.D., Ph.D., who will become chair of the committee after the June board meeting. Dr. Kaufman is professor and vice chair of research in the department of surgery at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University in Chicago.

Because of the current ambiguity in pancreas policy, individual OPOs are not required to allocate pancreata in a particular way and, as a result, OPOs vary widely in their approaches.

But with discussions of major revisions to kidney allocation policy under way, the pancreas committee now needs to find a solution to bring the pancreas and the kidney allocation policies into alignment.

Under the new concepts being discussed for kidney allocation, OPOs may be required to offer organs to local pancreas candidates before offering them to local kidney candidates. The OPOs have no such requirement when allocating pancreata to waiting candidates, although many already follow that process.

## GETTING THE PICTURE

To find out exactly how pancreata were being allocated across the country, in December the committee surveyed all 58 OPOs about their allocations from 2007, which provided a complete year’s worth of data for the committee to evaluate.

“We received some very interesting results,” committee liaison Sleeman said. Some of the findings include the following:

- A large majority of OPOs (44 of 58, or 87 percent) allocate from the pancreas waiting list before consulting the kidney list. Those same OPOs most commonly give the simultaneous kidney–pancreas transplant candidate priority, since the pancreas tends to work better when transplanted along with the kidney.
- Of the pancreata allocated locally in 2007, the largest percentage (83 percent) were allocated by OPOs doing its pancreas match run before doing the kidney match run. In Donor Service Areas where the OPO allocates to the kidney-alone list first, the pancreas candidate waits almost a year longer for a pancreas transplant.

Much of the committee’s work over the past two years became the subject of presentations at the American Transplant Congress (ATC).


## SPREADING THE WORD


At this year’s ATC, held in Boston, the OPTN/UNOS pancreas transplantation committee presented a poster summarizing the findings of the committee’s OPO survey.

The committee also gave an oral presentation on recently collected pancreas utilization data and on whether surgeons have the ability to increase the number of pancreata being transplanted based on the characteristics of the organs being used and the ones being discarded.

In addition, at a plenary session the committee—with the SRTR [Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients]—presented data on quality of the transplanted pancreas versus survival rate.

“All these activities are contributing to the knowledge base,” Sleeman said. “We’re getting the information out there, and from here we’ll be able to develop good, evidence-based policies.

“It’s possible,” she added, “that the committee may have a policy proposal out for public comment by 2010.” 

 If you have questions about the OPTN/UNOS pancreas transplantation committee or you want to add a discussion item to the agenda, please call committee liaison Elizabeth Sleeman at (804)782-4616 or send her an e-mail at [sleemaef@unos.org](mailto:sleemaef@unos.org).

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