UNOS' CTSE Awarded $1.7 Million Contract Modification

Transdisciplinary, systems-dynamics study to estimate deceased-donor potential

As the demand for organ transplantation continues to grow, many key decisions in medical care and national policy depend on a realistic estimate of the future number of potential deceased organ donors.

The Center for Transplant System Excellence (CTSE), a new UNOS initiative, will study the issue under UNOS' contract with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Department of Health and Human Services, for operation of OPTN.

HRSA will add $1.7 million in federal funds to the contract over two years to support the transdisciplinary study.

"We're at a pivotal time in transplantation, as many historical assumptions about donor potential are changing," said Kevin A. Myer, M.S.H.A., business director of the center. "Donation and transplant professionals accept a broader range of potential donors based on age and medical condition than they did just a decade ago.

"More broadly, changing trends in medical care, rates of disease in the population and rapidly changing demographics all affect mortality and donation potential," Myer added.

"We plan to combine research and expertise across a number of disciplines — transplant and public-health professionals, system science experts, social scientists — to address the topic in a way not traditionally viewed by those groups working separately," said Karl McCleary, Ph.D., M.P.H., scientific director for the center and the study's principal investigator.

"That way, we can get a fuller picture of what we can expect over the long term. In turn, we hope that policy-makers and clinicians," Dr. McCleary added, "will use the knowledge both to improve current transplant care for patients and better prepare for future challenges."

SYSTEMS-BASED APPROACH

Under the contract amendment, the CTSE will seek input from a number of experts in wide-ranging disciplines. The goal of the study is to develop a dynamic model to estimate donor potential both nationally and regionally over the next five to 10 years.

"The emphasis on systems-dynamics is particularly important," Dr. McCleary said. "Over time, practices will change because of the complex nature of the health-care delivery system and the dynamics of the population.

"We hope to develop a model that can suggest how donor potential may change as the U.S. population changes and as the field of transplantation reaches different conclusions about who is medically suitable to donate."

In addition to the overall number of possible donors, the study will seek to categorize them according to age and medical condition and how many may die of circulatory failure as opposed to brain death. The researchers will also examine assumptions about in-hospital location of potential donors in light of possible future changes in where and when death is declared, as this may also affect the potential for donation.

The study represents the first major project for the Center for Transplant System Excellence. The center will utilize the expertise and capabilities of UNOS staff in collaboration with academic and clinical researchers, nationally and internationally, who share an interest in advancing the field of transplantation.

"With the formation of this center, we plan to bring a focused approach to a number of problems and opportunities that affect the entire transplant community but have lacked systematic efforts," said UNOS executive director Walter Graham.

"We want to encourage partnerships across the academic and health-care spectrum," Graham said, "so that we all may have a better understanding and can apply the lessons learned." U

ONLINE To see the Center for Transplant System Excellence website, which is still under development, visit *transplantexcellence.org*.

CENTER FOR TRANSPLANT SYSTEM EXCELLENCE