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More than 19,000 patients waiting for kidney transplant

KUALA LUMPUR: More than 19,000 kidney patients are in the waiting list to get an elusive transplant as it is difficult to convince Malaysians to become organ donors.

With only 60 transplants a year, the country was in dire need for more donors to come forward, said Health Ministry medical development division transplant unit head Dr Hirman Ismail.

"There are 300,000 Malaysians who have registered as organ donors, who represent only one per cent of the population.

"We are targeting a conservative figure of 35,000 to 40,000 new organ donors to register," he said, adding that Malaysia was among the countries with the highest number of patients requiring dialysis per capita in the world.

National Kidney Foundation (NKF) chairman Datuk Dr Zaki Morad Mohd Zaher said it was not easy to convince people to pledge to donate their organs, and that was the reason for the low number in

kidney transplants.

"The number of people who are willing to donate their kidneys to their loved ones is very few here. We have less than one per cent of the population who are willing to do so."

Besides living donors, Dr Zaki said, they also faced hurdles in securing organs from cadaveric donors (organ donors who had died) due to loopholes in the system.

"We adapted the opting-in system, whereby when an organ donor dies, the next-of-kin will have to give consent before the state or hospital is allowed to harvest the organs. Unfortunately, in most cases, it is difficult for us to get the consent.

"Other countries, such as Singapore and Austria, are using the opting-out system where the state or hospital has the right to take the organs of those who have pledged

them without consulting the next of kin."

The government, he said, was fine-tuning a new law to replace the Human Tissues Act 1974, which was established to regulate organ donation for science and research.

"The new law is expected to ensure surgeons receive adequate training and competence to handle the operation and only hospitals with proper facilities are allowed to perform transplant surgeries.

"It will also prevent organ trading."

He said the public should not worry about living with one kidney.

"A healthy donor should be able to lead a normal life. They can get married, have children and continue working. In fact, there are people who were born with only one kidney and they, too, can live their life as usual."



Datuk Dr Zaki Morad Mohd Zaher