

## Commentary: Awareness about eye donation among medical and nursing students

The importance of organ donation cannot be overemphasized and this issue of the *Indian Journal of Ophthalmology* (IJO) features an important article on the awareness of eye donation among medical and nursing students.<sup>[1]</sup> The coronavirus pandemic has made the scarcity of organ donation all the more acute. Organ donation in India is governed by the Transplantation of Human Organs and tissue Act (THOTA) 1994 and Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules, 2014.<sup>[2]</sup>

Some organs/tissues like kidney, liver, skin, and blood can be given antemortem. Organs like the heart, lungs, and eyes can only be donated post mortem. Awareness among the general population has been improved by advertisement and signing pledge forms by celebrities. Certain communities and religions actively promote organ donation and account for a maximum number of donors, whereas some others have reservations.

Regardless of religion, community, gender, and age, the need for organ donation is all-pervasive. In Ophthalmology,

eye donation is mostly used for corneal transplants. However, other components of eye including the sclera can also be used for research and clinical care. Corneal blindness can be rectified by transplantation. Eye donation to alleviate corneal blindness is needed worldwide. Latest statistics show 4.2 million people worldwide have blindness due to corneal opacities. Added to that, the blindness due to trachoma is another 2 million.<sup>[3]</sup>

In India, corneal opacities have emerged as the second leading cause of blindness.<sup>[4]</sup> The requirement of corneal tissue is far more than the number of eye donations. In this study in IJO,<sup>[1]</sup> the medical students quizzed about their knowledge of eye donation were in their fourth year of medical studies as Ophthalmology was a subject in that year. Not surprisingly and it is indeed heartening to know that 100% of medical students were aware of eye donation as compared to 91.3% of the nursing students. The knowledge that eyes can be donated by family members after death without prior pledging by the deceased was however known more to nursing (55%) as compared to medical students (46%). The reason for the lack of organ donation among family members of both medical and nursing students included a lack of awareness and objection of family members along with religious restrictions.

A study about awareness of eye donation among the lay public done by Priyadarshini *et al.*<sup>[5]</sup> showed that 50.69% of the 507 participants in the study were aware of eye donations. The source of information was mainly publicity materials. Illiteracy and rural residence were cited as important reasons for lack of awareness regarding eye donation and corneal transplantation. A study<sup>[6]</sup> involving nursing, medical, and allied health sciences students in Goa, India, showed that 97.9% of the participants were aware of eye donation. Wish to donate eyes was present in 42.6% of candidates.<sup>[6]</sup> Another study on nursing students in Bengaluru<sup>[7]</sup> noted that 96.8% of candidates knew about eye donation and 85.1% had a willingness to donate eyes. Around 38% of participants knew that ideally eye should be collected within 6 hours after death.

Innovative strategies for increasing awareness regarding organ donation in general and eye donation, in particular, have to be developed. Medical and nursing students should have organ donation in their curriculum in their first year of medical school. High school students may also be made ambassadors of the campaign for eye donation. Celebrity endorsement and public pledging by them will increase awareness among the general public. Campaign promoting eye donation should reach far corners of our country not only during eye donation fortnight (August 25 to September 8) but also throughout the year.

All multimedia sources including broadband services which have high penetration into the interiors of the land can be mobilized to impress on the rural and urban population, about the importance and the need for eye donation and the impact it will have on reducing cornea related blindness.

In conclusion, efforts have to be made to educate the general public and the medical fraternity about the importance as well as the need for eye donation.

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