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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Attitude of patients toward transplantation of xenogeneic organs

The very interesting and important contribution of Schlitt et al. [1] was to question patients about their attitude toward xenografts. Since major ethical concerns were voiced about a similar study that was planned at our University Hospital, we decided to conduct a survey on students' attitudes to organ transplantation in the first year of medical school.

Schlitt et al. investigated a group of patients who had already undergone transplantation and patients on waiting lists throughout Germany. We added a third group, namely young adults who had recently begun studying medicine. Ninety-five first-year medical students were included in the study. The female to male ratio was 0.8. The overall interest in transplantation was 96%. About 45% of the sample voiced basic concerns about xenotransplantation. Only 26% of all students were definitively against xenotransplantation. Interestingly, more married students were against than others, even including age as a co-variate. As in the study of Schlitt et al. religion or ethnicity did not have discernible influences. In contrast to the results of the cited study, sex did not have an influence either. In addition, most students were strongly against the use of genetically altered animals. As in the study of Schlitt's et al. [1], pigs were the most favored xenograft donor ($P<0.005$ vs monkey, sheep, and $P<0.02$ vs other genetically manipulated animals). Moreover, most students did not have any ethical misgivings about the use of animal farms for raising donor animals for xenotransplantion, irrespective of age, gender, or religion (critical difference 43.9%, $P<0.02$).

We favor a very early inclusion of such learning items covering as xenotransplantation in the medical curriculum. These items make students more critical of and more knowledgeable about organ donation [2]. The information we gathered provides insight into whether and to what extent patients differ from lay persons in the very sensitive chapter of organ transplantation, which is represented by xenotransplantation. However, a comparison of the attitudes of terminal patients on waiting lists and lay persons' or first-year medical students' attitudes is interesting because of the different situation the two populations are facing during their life span. Finally, the attitudes that various groups of subjects have toward an operation such as xenotransplantation, which is far from having been introduced into routine medical practice [3] remain a most interesting issue.

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