Ethical Issues and Transplantation in Scientific Journals

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BACKGROUND:
- Previous study on representations of organ transplantation (OT) in Quebec newspapers: Overemphasis on OT successes, Uncertainty about being transplanted but certainty of success once the transplantation has taken place.
- Scientific journals (2-4):
  - Important vehicle for disseminating information to healthcare professionals
  - Not value-free
  - Aim: inform, promote excellence, lead the debate.
- No analysis of how ethical issues related to OT are treated in medical journals.

PURPOSE:
- Analyze ethical issues related to OT as they appear in internal medicine (IM) and transplantation journals.

METHODS:
- Sampling: PubMed database
  - Keywords: transplantation or graft AND organ or liver or kidney or heart or lung
  - Study period: 01-01-1995 to 31-12-2008
- IM journals:
  - Top 10 IM journals with the highest impact factor
  - 1,120 articles retrieved; 349 analyzed
  - Transplantation journals:
    - American Journal of Transplantation
    - 4,644 articles retrieved; 349 randomly selected and analyzed
- Content analysis

REFERENCES:

RESULTS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organ</th>
<th>IM Journals</th>
<th>Transplant Journals</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>105 (30.1)</td>
<td>148 (42.4)</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>72 (20.6)</td>
<td>87 (24.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>58 (16.6)</td>
<td>25 (7.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lung</td>
<td>26 (7.4)</td>
<td>14 (4.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancreas</td>
<td>5 (1.4)</td>
<td>3 (0.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-organ</td>
<td>37 (10.6)</td>
<td>43 (12.3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>46 (13.2)</td>
<td>29 (8.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTINENT OF ORIGIN:
- The Americas: 181 (51.8)
- Europe: 135 (38.7)
- Other: 33 (9.5)

ARTICLE TYPE:
- Original articles: 111 (31.8)
- Communications: 110 (31.5)
- Reviews: 46 (13.2)
- Editorials: 41 (11.7)
- Case reports: 21 (6.0)
- Correspondence: 17 (4.8)
- Other: 3 (0.9)

ETHICAL ISSUES:
- Ethical issues were raised in 24.1% of the IM journal articles and in 6.6% of the transplantation journal articles.
- In the IM journals, 44% of the articles reporting on ethical issues were brief communications.
- In the transplantation journals, 52% of the articles reporting on ethical issues were original articles based on research or clinical trials.

CONCLUSION:
- Few of the articles reported on ethical issues related to OT.
- Organ shortage and organ allocation were the two most important ethical issues raised.
- Ethical issues were more frequently discussed in the IM journals.
  - There were more original articles in the transplantation journals.
  - Do these findings suggest that ethical concerns should be debated not only in the transplant community but in the medical community at large?
  - Would the results have been different if we had included nephrology journals in our sample?
- Further studies are needed to have a clearer perspective on ethical issues in the transplant community.
- This study provides insights into ethics and transplantation priorities in IM and transplantation journals, which could influence policies and guidelines.

The Lancet. For author. 2011 [cited 2011 December 7]; Available from: http://annals.org/site/misc/about.xhtml
BMJ. About BMJ. 2011 [cited 2011 December 7]; Available from: http://www.bmj.com/about.bmj