

Ethical Issues and Transplantation in Scientific Journals

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BACKGROUND:

- Previous study on representations of organ transplantation (OT) in Quebec newspapers (1):
 - 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
 - Aims:
 - 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

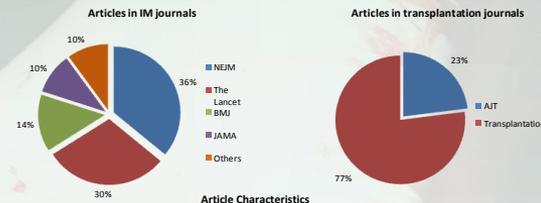
METHODS:

- 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 and Transplantation*
 - 4,644 articles retrieved; 349 randomly selected and analyzed
- Content analysis

References

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Results



	Internal medicine journals N=349 (%)	Transplantation journals N=349 (%)	P-value
Organs			P<0.001
Kidney	105 (30.1)	148 (42.4)	
Liver	72 (20.6)	87 (24.9)	
Heart	58 (16.6)	25 (7.2)	
Lung	26 (7.4)	14 (4.0)	
Pancreas	5 (1.4)	3 (0.9)	
Multi-organ	37 (10.6)	43 (12.3)	
Not mentioned	46 (13.2)	29 (8.3)	
Continent of origin			P=0.3292
The Americas	181 (51.8)	167 (47.9)	
Europe	135 (38.7)	154 (44.1)	
Other	33 (9.5)	28 (8.0)	
Article type			P<0.001
Original articles	111 (31.8)	221 (63.3)	
Brief communications	110 (31.5)	69 (19.8)	
Reviews	46 (13.2)	23 (6.6)	
Editorials	41 (11.7)	3 (0.9)	
Case reports	21 (6.0)	31 (8.9)	
Correspondence	17 (4.8)	2 (0.6)	
Other	3 (0.9)	0 (0)	

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.

Ethical Issues

Autonomy (almost exclusively in IM journals)	Beneficence (both journals)	Justice (both journals)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed consent: research, minors, incapacitated adults, refusal, information provided • Organ market: sellers' and buyers' autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risks vs. benefits: assessment methods, pregnancy (only in IM journals), transplantation with marginal donor, choice of medication, HIV patients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organ allocation • Disparities in access to organ transplantation (gender, ethnicity, geography) • Personal responsibilities and organ transplantation

- Principles of sound allocation policy:
 - Equity
 - Equal chances
 - Medical urgency
 - Transparency
 - Efficacy
 - Personal responsibilities
 - Hope
- Shortage of organs:
 - "huge and growing gap," "stark disparity"
 - Transplant community = "stewards of a precious resource"

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 journal sample and more editorials in the IM journal sample (selection bias?).
 - 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 insight into ethics and transplantation priorities in IM and transplantation journals, which could influence policies and guidelines.