

Papers based on data concerning organs from executed prisoners should not be published

To The Editors,

The paper "Safety limitations of fatty liver transplantation can be extended to 40%: experience of a single centre in China" claims that of the 564 liver transplants performed at the First Affiliated Hospital of Zhejiang University's School of Medicine from April 2010 to October 2014, not a single organ was from an executed prisoner.¹

Unfortunately, it is difficult to see how this claim might be true. There were virtually no voluntary organ transplants in China up until 2010. During the period of this study, more than 90% of all organs for transplantation were from executed prisoners.² In 2010, a pilot programme of voluntary donation was trialed, leading to reports of 2326 "voluntary citizen donations" between 2011 and 2014, but this figure includes an undisclosed number of organs retrieved from "volunteer" executed prisoners.³ Thus, during the period of the Yu et al. study, executed prisoners remained the primary sources of organs for all transplants in China.

International programmes report relatively low rates of procurement of livers from DCD donors. In the USA, rates of liver transplant from DCD donors in the years 2012–14 were 32%, 28% and 27% respectively.⁴ If retrieval rates are similar in China, this would require 1880 DCD donors (assuming a retrieval rate of 30%) to transplant the 564 livers reported in this paper. Given that there were only 2326 reported voluntary donations in the whole of China during 2011–2014, it is implausible that this small pool could have resulted in 564 livers successfully retrieved at the First Affiliated Hospital of Zhejiang University's School of Medicine unless the surgeons there had exclusive access to at least 80% of all voluntary donors across the whole of China in this period. The sheer size of China and the lack of a co-ordinated nationwide system of transportation of organs within the timeframe required for successful liver transplantations suggest that such a scenario is not credible.

We request the editors to take action on this paper. It breaches international organ donation ethical standards by reporting on the outcomes of transplants using organs that are almost certainly from executed prisoners.⁵ The burden of proof rests on the authors to

demonstrate and explain the ethical sourcing of organs used in this research. Such evidence should be published alongside the article if supplied. In the absence of credible evidence of ethical sourcing of organs, we request that the article be retracted.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no financial or other conflicts of interest to declare.

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