

Ethical Challenges in Organ Donation

Speaker: Dr Abdul Jabbar bin Ismail

Organ donation, a vital component in saving lives, presents unique ethical challenges, particularly in Malaysia's diverse socio-cultural context. The talk will explore these ethical dilemmas, focusing on donation after brain and cardiac death and living donation. In Malaysia, where organ donation rates are significantly low, understanding these challenges is crucial for ethical policy development and public awareness.

In Malaysia, the acceptance of brain death, defined as the irreversible cessation of all brain functions, is fraught with cultural and religious interpretations. The ethical debate intensifies when considering the consent process, especially in a multi-ethnic society with varying beliefs about death and the afterlife. The talk will discuss how these perspectives influence family consent rates and the ethical implications of presumed consent versus explicit consent policies.

Secondly, the talk will examine donors after cardiac death, where ethical concerns arise from the determination of death and the withdrawal of life support. The timing of death declaration, crucial for organ viability, poses ethical questions about hastening death for donation purposes. This aspect is particularly sensitive in Malaysia, where religious and cultural beliefs often intersect with medical decisions.

Lastly, the talk will delve into the ethics of living donation, highlighting issues such as donor autonomy, informed consent, and the risk-benefit balance. In Malaysia, the ethical concern is amplified by the potential for coercion or commercialization, especially in the context of low deceased donor rates. The talk will also explore how these factors impact the decision-making process of potential living donors and the ethical responsibility of healthcare providers.

In conclusion, there is a need for culturally sensitive and ethically sound policies in organ donation in Malaysia. It calls for a balanced approach that respects diverse beliefs while addressing the critical shortage of organs, ultimately saving lives while upholding ethical standards.