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Poor identification of brain death cases impacting organ donations: Health Ministry

Centre issues guidelines to identify each potential brain stem death case admitted in the ICU

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Poor identification and certification of brain stem death or brain death cases is keeping the rate of organ donations at low levels in India, despite the availability of many potential cases, the Union Health Ministry has said.

Expressing concern over the rate of organ donations in the country remaining at less than one donor per million population in a year, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) asked health authorities in States/Union Territories to identify each potential brain death case admitted in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and inquire whether the potential donor had pledged for organ donation. If not, hospital authorities should make family members aware of the opportunity to donate organs before the heart stops.

Issuing a Standard Operating Procedure under the provisions of the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994, the DGHS said the doctor on duty in hospitals, with the help of the transplant coordinator, should make necessary inquiries after the brain death cases are certified by the competent authority.

Requesting every hospital to facilitate and monitor the certification of brain death cases to ensure compliance with the THOTA Act and Rules, the Health Ministry asked hospitals to install 'Required Request Display Boards' at strategic locations conveying the message to the public that in the unfortunate event of brain death or cardiac arrest, donation of organs and tissues — like kidney, liver, heart, pancreas, eyes, skin and bones etc. — could save lives.

The DGHS also issued a proforma for collecting relevant information from hospitals so that the data could be analysed and corrective action taken to maximise organ donation from all potential donors. Organ transplant authorities in every State/Union Territory were told to furnish data related to the number of patients who expired in the ICU with cause of death.

As part of the initiatives to augment the organ donation rate and achieve self-sufficiency in the field of deceased organ donation, the authorities were told to update the National Organ & Tissue Transplant Organisation, on a monthly basis, on the number of brain death cases identified and certified, number of cases where the family gave consent to donate organs and the number of organs donated and utilised among other details.

Going by the transplant data, a total of 16,041 organs, mostly kidneys, were donated in 2022. Delhi topped the country with 3,818 donations followed by Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Kerala which reported 2,245, 1,525 and 1,472 donations, respectively.