

## Half of kidney patients' care providers have at times suspected illegal organ trade

**'Care providers should be able to report suspicions anonymously without revealing patients' identity**

**Almost half (46 percent) of the Dutch transplant professionals who treat kidney patients know patients who traveled abroad in the past five years for a kidney transplant. In 90 percent of the cases, the care providers suspected, or were sure that the organ had been paid for. Paying for organs is illegal in the Netherlands.**

These findings are the result of a study carried out by criminologist/international lawyer Frederike Ambagtsheer, who works at the department of Nephrology and Transplantation at Erasmus MC. A total of 241 medical professionals who treat kidney patients participated in the survey.

Ambagtsheer and her co-authors argue that disclosing the identity of patients who are going to purchase or who have purchased a kidney to police authorities is not justified. But they proclaim that it should be made possible for care providers to warn the police, without revealing the patient's identity. Transplant professionals should be able to anonymously reveal the names of physicians and hospitals, as well as intermediaries, who facilitate illegal transplants to a central hotline. However, the patient's approval is necessary to make this possible. Or alternatively, an amendment of the law is required.

The survey is part of an international study on human trafficking for the purpose of organ removal, that is funded by the European Commission. The study, called the HOTT project, is coordinated by Erasmus MC. The researchers distributed the anonymous survey among Dutch transplant surgeons, nephrologists, transplant coordinators, nurses and social workers.

Although the care providers said that the majority of the patients traveled to countries outside the EU, 17 transplant professionals say they treated patients between 2008 and 2013 whom they suspected of having bought organs in the Netherlands. Two patients admitted to having paid a donor in the Netherlands for their kidney.

Furthermore, 13 transplant professionals said that they are treating donors who have sold their kidney to a patient in the Netherlands. Nine transplant professionals suspected human trafficking for organ removal between 2008 and 2013. Three professionals reported that the donor had told them that he/she had been forced to donate a kidney.

These and many more findings will be presented in a report on organ trafficking and human trafficking for organ removal written by the Central Division of the National Police of The Netherlands\*, which is a partner of the HOTT project. Erasmus MC, the National Police and other project partners will present their findings, together with the results of the HOTT project, during a symposium on 21 November, which will be held at Europol Headquarters in The Hague. The first recommendations for law enforcement, health care institutions, transplant professionals and human rights NGOs to combat this type of human trafficking will also be launched during the symposium.

[www.hottproject.com](http://www.hottproject.com)

• As of 1 January 2013 (with the advent of the national police) the police has been divided into 10 police regions and the eCentral Division of the National Police of The Netherlands, formerly the KLPD. The Central Division of the National Police includes specialist national and international police services.

**Note for editors:**

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