

JAY TALWALKER, MD: Hi. My name is Jay Talwalker. I'm a transplant pathologist at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. And today, I'd like to talk to you about a recent study that was published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*, looking at the effect of policies on increasing organ donation and transplant rates in the United States.

Currently, about 124,000 patients require an organ transplant, and yet, 79,000 patients remain on active waiting lists. Unfortunately, because of the shortage of organs, an estimated 6,000 patients are expected to die annually when they could have received a lifesaving procedure. Despite numerous policies to increase organ donation rates, there does not appear to be any evidence to suggest these policies have had any significant effect, in terms of increasing transplant rates.

The recent study that was published looked at six major types of state organ donation strategies. These include first-person consent laws, donor registries, dedicated revenue streams for donor recruitment, education programs for the population, paid leave programs, and finally, tax incentive. The authors looked at the number of solid organ donors and transplants per state, per year from a time period of 1988 to 2010 as their primary outcome.

What the study authors found was that the number of states passing a policy to increase organ donation did increase substantially from a total of seven states to nearly all-- sorry-- nearly 50 states by 2010. Unfortunately, only one of the strategies that they looked at, which was the development of revenue pools by individuals donating to states to increase donation rates to be the most effective way of increasing organ donations and transplants. About 5% increases were noticed. All the other policies, including tax incentives, failed to increase donation or transplant rates. Most of the donation increases were seen among deceased donors as opposed to living donors, but the study period wasn't long enough to look at that.

The authors described some limitations with their study, including not being able to identify when the policies were actually implemented. And they didn't look at the impact that we've seen, in terms of reduced donation as a result of better safety laws, including people needing to use helmets for motorcycles and better traffic laws.

In an accompanying editorial, the authors who commented on the study, agreed with the initial author's recommendation that the current effective organ donation policies has not been what we've been looking for. They suggest that we embark on pilot testing of new strategies that are more disruptive to see if we can increase organ donation rates beyond traditional measures, including altruism.

There are still concerns about the effect of creating a free market economy for organs and perhaps, having some individuals being disadvantaged, in terms of organ donation, but clearly what we're doing today is not helping us increase the number of organs and lifesaving transplants that we can make available for our patients. Thus, new strategies, I think, will allow us to close the gap on the widening mismatch between organ supply and demand. Thank you.