

Trial to encourage transplant donors

By WANG QINGYUN in Beijing and LI WENFANG in Guangzhou

A dying 12-year-old boy in Guangzhou recently donated his organs to help others, a sign of the country's progress in setting up a transparent and effective system of organ donation, experts said.

Identified only as Luo, the boy died on July 23 in the city's Nanfang Hospital, where he was receiving treatment for a malignant brain tumor.

"From later that day to 8 the next morning, the hospital staff conducted operations to transplant his liver, kidneys and cornea into four patients, who are all now recovering very well," said Wang Yong, organ donation coordinator at the hospital.

The parents said the boy had said he wanted to donate his organs.

"When his parents told the hospital that they would like to donate his organs, we told them about organ donation policies, explaining, for instance, that money is not paid for organs," Wang said. "His mother's words impressed me. She said that she never thought about anything else. She just wanted her child to live on this way."

Luo is the 91st person to donate organs in Guangdong province since the province began taking part in a trial of a national organ donation system in April 2010, said Li Jindong, deputy director of the organ donation office of the Guangdong branch of the Red Cross Society of China.

"Since the start of the program, there have been 15 donations in 2010," Li said. "The number was 31 in 2011, and Guangdong had the most organ donations in the program for two consecutive years. There have been 45 donations this year so far."

To bring the supply of organs closer to meet the demand for them, the RCSC and the Ministry of Health started a trial donation program in 10 provinces and municipalities in March 2010 and later expand-



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ed it to include 16 places.

In the long run, the system is meant to establish a national system through which information on organ donations can be shared and donated organs can be allocated in a transparent manner.

Data from the RCSC show the system helped to arrange 343 donations from March 2010 to July 15, leading to transplants of 924 large organs such as hearts, livers, kidneys and lungs.

A staff worker at the organization, who declined to be identified, said Guangdong and Zhejiang provinces and Tianjin municipality had the largest number of donations among the 16 places in the system by June 30.

Guangdong, Zhejiang and Tianjin have also seen increases in donations in the past three years, according to their respective branches of the RCSC.

Cao Yanfang, who works for the organ donation office of the Zhejiang branch, said 44 people in Zhejiang have donated their organs since the start of the system.

"The province began the program in August 2010," Cao said. "We had two cases of donations from August to December that year. In 2011, we had 13 cases. This year we have had 29 cases so far."

Tianjin was among the first places to adopt the system, starting on March 2, 2010. An employee with the municipality's Red Cross, who declined to be named, said six donations took place there from

March to December 2010. In 2011, the number increased to 11, and 13 donations took place in Tianjin in the first half of this year.

"By now, the number of donations this year has surpassed the entire number for last year," he said.

He said Tianjin worked with a television station last year to broadcast an advertisement encouraging organ donations. It also posted ads in subway stations and at hospitals.

"Through this work, the public now has a much better attitude toward organ donations," he said. "We find they are less hostile toward organ donations, and we have a better chance of obtaining permission to conduct organ donations from potential donors' families."

"Although we haven't yet achieved an ideal state of affairs, the past two years have made things better," he said.

Zhai Xiaomei, a professor at Peking Union Medical College's bioethics center, praised the work, saying: "Organ donation is noble and altruistic. We should encourage more people to accept it through advocacy."

Zhai said the trial program is progressing well and believed that the country will have a fair and transparent national system for organ donations in the near future.

Even so, the more than 300 donations that have taken place since the start of the system are still far from adequate to meet the demand for organs, Zhai said.

"Although members of the program have worked really hard and the number of donations is increasing in places such as Guangdong, Zhejiang and Tianjin, the figure is still too small compared with the number of people who are on the waiting list," she added. "A large number of donations is needed to support a donation system."

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EXPLOSION KILLS 11

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Rescuers find a survivor who was buried under a collapsed house after an explosion rocked a family-owned workshop in a village in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, on Sunday afternoon. Eleven people were killed and more than a dozen injured as of 9:30 pm, the local government said. Rescuers were still digging the ruins although there was no signs of life at the site.

Major crackdown in fake medicine scam

By WANG QINGYUN
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Police have arrested more than 1,900 people suspected of making and selling fake medicine in a series of raids on underground production bases, the Ministry of Public Security said on Sunday.

The nationwide operation, which started on July 25 and involved 18,000 police officers in 31 provincial-level regions, has crushed 24 networks manufacturing counterfeit medical products worth 1.16 billion yuan (\$182 million).

Police seized 205 million tablets designed to look like brand-name products for treating hypertension, diabetes, skin diseases and cancer, the ministry said.

Some medicines contained sibutramine, a chemical used to treat obesity that was banned by the State Food and Drug Administration in 2010 due to fears that it increases the risk of cardiovascular problems.

The suspects also put sedative and hallucinogenic chemicals into the tablets to deceive consumers into believing that the fake drugs had an effect.

Police also found bottles of normal saline solution labeled as a rabies vaccine.

The ministry said it has destroyed a large number of production sites and trade channels in the past two years.

However, the crime is "far from being rooted out, as such criminals have come up with new methods", the ministry said in its online statement.

The ministry also said it had found sham promotions of fake products on the Internet, television and magazines during the crackdown.

A ministry spokesperson warned that people should purchase medicines in hospitals and pharmacies who are trusted vendors of genuine products, and advised against buying medicines that do not have approved names and numbers distributed by the SFDA.

"The ministry welcomes reports on the manufacture and sale of fake drugs," read the ministry statement. "We will reward informers 500 to 50,000 yuan if the report is found to be true. We offer ample rewards to those who play an important role in cracking large gangs committing such crimes."

Li Zhongdong, a pharmacist at the Air Force General Hospital in Beijing, said the crime is likely to continue because of "the huge profits" it brings.

"Fake medicines are usually sold to small clinics and small pharmacies," Li said. "There are people who choose to seek medical help from these places, possibly because of lower prices or privacy concerns, which may increase their chances of getting such counterfeit products and their sales."

Li suggested buyers check with the online inquiry system at the SFDA to ensure the medicines they bought are genuine.

The system provides information such as the name and approval number of medicines whose production has been approved by the SFDA.

Experts call to improve monitoring of organ trade

By CAO YIN
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Experts called on Sunday for authorities to improve hospital supervision to prevent the trade and trafficking of human organs.

Police announced on Saturday that 137 suspects had been caught in the latest crackdown on human organ trafficking.

The investigation was conducted around the end of July by 18 provincial authorities who rescued 127 potential organ suppliers, according to a statement from the Ministry of Public Security.

In April, police in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province, uncovered a gang suspected of organizing and trafficking in human organs with other "black agencies" in Beijing, Shandong and Anhui provinces, the statement said.

The gangs coordinated with each other and formed a large network for human organ sales, the ministry said.

The suspects illegally recruited suppliers over the Internet, facilitated the deals and made huge profits from the transactions, which endangered the health of the suppliers and placed a heavy financial burden on the recipients, the ministry added.

The 2011 amendments to China's Criminal Law introduced three clauses related to the illegal organ trade. Con-

victed offenders face prison terms of more than five years and fines, said Zeng Xinhua, a researcher in criminal law at Beijing Normal University.

Criminals convicted of "forced organ removal, forced organ donation or organ removal from juveniles" could face homicide charges under the law.

"We've always paid great attention to human organ sales, because organizing such a trade has greatly damaged the social order and people's health," said Zhao Qiming, deputy director of the criminal investigation bureau of the ministry.

Some experts said authorities have difficulty solving human organ trading cases.

"Some gangs get organs from people in great need of money and provide the organs to those who urgently want an organ transplant surgery," said Liu Tao, an associate professor specializing in criminal investigation with the Chinese People's Public Security University.

"These hidden trades can be conducted smoothly because both the buyers and sellers are willing to do the deal."

According to the Ministry of Health, about 1.5 million Chinese need organ transplants every year, but only around 10,000 transplants are performed annually due to a lack of donors.

The huge gap has led to a thriving illegal market for human organs, although the government has repeatedly pledged to improve regulations on organ transplants and increase the supply.

China's central government issued its first national level regulations on human organ transplants in 2007, banning organizations and individuals from trading human organs. But there are still some loopholes in the supervision of hospitals.

Liu said hospitals urgently need to establish a nationwide online database to share information on organ receivers and providers.

"In this way, the organ transplant system can be more transparent and the public can better supervise the hospitals' work," he added.

To increase the supply of legally harvested organs, Chinese health authorities are building an official network to facilitate organ donations.

Huang Jiefu, vice-minister of health, said in late March that because of a shortage of organ donations from the public, the majority of organs came from prisoners — with their consent — who had been executed.

Huang promised to change the situation in three to five years by promoting a reliable donor system and encouraging donations from the public.



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