



## Market-based organ donation: A solution to the shortages?

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As I look at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) website for [The Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network](#) (OPTN) today, there are 123,000 people on waiting lists for organs, with the bulk of them waiting for kidneys.

The unfortunate and tragic thing in the United States and in other countries, people die while waiting for organs for transplantation. In fact, according to [OrganDonor.gov](#), an average of 18 people die each day waiting for transplants that can't take place because of the shortage of donated organs. That adds up to 6,570 people a year.

Clearly, organ donation strictly via altruism falls short- the supply does not meet the demand.

In comes free-market economics. Long time [compensated donor advocate](#), Nobel Prize-winning professor of economics at the University of Chicago, Gary Becker and Julio Elias from Universidad del CEMA in Argentina say compensating organ donors would save lives by increasing the supply of organs available.

In an [Wall Street Journal Op-Ed](#) earlier this year, Becker and Elias make a case for “cash for kidneys” or establishing a market for organs. The economists write, “Paying donors for their organs would finally eliminate the supply-demand gap. In particular, sufficient payment to kidney donors would increase the supply of kidneys by a large percentage, without greatly increasing the total cost of a kidney transplant.” They conclude that kidneys, both live and cadaveric, would be available for an average of \$15,000 each.

Since the number of kidneys available at a reasonable price would be far more than needed to close the gap between the demand and supply of kidneys, there would no longer be any significant waiting time to get a kidney transplant. The number of people on dialysis would decline dramatically, and deaths due to long waits for a transplant would essentially disappear.

Gary Becker isn't alone. The CATO Institute's bioethicist, [Sigrid Fry-Revere](#), also a long-time free market advocate said in a commentary about 10 years ago:

The solution to the organ shortage is to allow a free market in all aspects of organ and tissue procurement. Let the market do what it does best — match those with goods and services with those who need them. It would be nice if altruistic motives were enough to provide all the organs and tissues needed, but why, in a society where the exchange of money for goods and services is the norm, should people be limited to the two options of giving their bodies away or having the government take them without asking?

Let people sell their kidneys while they are alive (most people have two), and let people stipulate in their wills that they want to sell their organs, bone and other tissues at death. Insurance companies can create real incentives — financial incentives — to get people to donate. Incentives such as a partial reduction in premiums when someone signs up as a donor and the payment of funeral expenses once the organs are harvested. The real way to stop the transplant nightmare is staring us in the face. Just let people do what they naturally do — exchange money for goods and services.

Dr. Fry-Revere [cites the example of Iran](#), yes [Iran](#), on a organ procurement system that takes care of not only the recipient, but also the donor via a compensated system. She details this in her latest book, *The Kidney Sellers*.

Many readers will say compensating donors is unethical and will lead to taking advantage of the poor; however, one might ask, “How ethical is it to let 6,500 people die because of unnecessary organ shortages?” Shouldn't this option be looked at seriously?