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*Politics, Policies, and Problems with Organ Transplantation:
Government Regulation Needed to Ration Organs Equitably*

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Abstract by Meredyth S. Cooper

The author examines the organ transplantation system within the United States, and argues that more stringent government regulation is needed in order to ensure organs are distributed equitably and safely to those who need them.

The number of organ recipients waiting for a transplant has more than tripled, while the number of available organs has remained stable at a relatively low rate. In addition to an unequal supply and demand of organs, bad press and a lack of uniform standards to guide the placing and prioritization of patients on organ transplant waiting lists have led to significant problems within this largely private, self-regulated system. This comment explains the history of regulation within the organ transplant context and the current problems plaguing the system, while arguing why stronger regulation by the Department of Health and Human Services is needed to develop, implement, and enforce uniform policies, rules, and standards so that the organ transplant system can be conducted in an equitable and safe manner. Lack of standardization in ranking patients on waiting lists, unavailability of sanctions for member organizations that violate policies prohibiting preference of certain transplant centers over others, and lack of a uniform definition of what is an “acceptable” donor organ have widely been criticized by the media. Negative media coverage of organ transplantation often encourages public distrust of the transplant system, and leads to fewer organs being donated. This author argues uniform government regulation is needed to determine standards clearly defining eligibility for a transplant, guidelines on which patients are suitable for transplant, and uniform donor acceptance criteria to decrease risk to patient health and safety. The author also notes that Congress should rethink its initial findings that providing financial incentives for organ donation would violate society’s morality.