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Religious barriers to head transplantation: An Islamic viewpoint

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RELIGIOUS BARRIERS TO HEAD TRANSPLANTATION: AN ISLAMIC VIEWPOINT**RUNNING TITLE: ISLAM AND HEAD TRANSPLANTATION**

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I have read with great interest the latest papers discussing the state of the art on head transplantation (HT) and its medical and non-medical considerations [1,2]. It is well documented in the literature that religions, including Islam, influence organ donation and transplantation (ODT) activities [3]. It is thus imperative to bring up some religious considerations on HT that are expected to influence the progress of HT in future, which is what I aim to do in this commentary from an Islamic perspective.

Late response from Muslim scholars

Islam, as most other religions, permits ODT [3]. However, it was too late when Muslim scholars announced for the first time that organ donation and transplantation complies with Islamic teachings. The first successful kidney transplant was performed in 1954 by Joseph Murray, while the official fatwas (Islamic ruling) permitting ODT were produced more than two decades later, in the early 1980s. During this fatwa absence, many Muslims might have abstained from being involved in ODT activities -as donors, recipients or even healthcare professionals- believing that ODT is forbidden. Many patients might have died as a result. Although the first head transplant seems around the corner, until the moment of writing this commentary, there is no fatwa regarding HT and its possible consequences. Therefore, to save the lives of many patients in future, I urge Muslim scholars and Islamic councils to begin studying and discussing the issue of HT to pave the way for comprehensive fatwa-making pertaining HT as soon as possible.

Prohibition of reproductive organs transplantation

The reproductive concerns of HT were highlighted by Furr et al [2]. From Islamic perspective these concerns might be the prime reason for Muslim scholars to prohibit HT. Although Islam

permits ODT, transplantation of reproductive organs is strictly prohibited. On this point, Dr, Yousuf Al-Qaraddawi, chairman of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, stated “What I see is that transplant testicle is not permissible, since specialized scholars state that testicle is the storage [of genes] that transfer the genetic characteristics of men and families and this is considered a type of genealogy mix-up that is prohibited... [4].” The grand mufti of Tunisia issued a fatwa stipulates that sexual and reproductive organ transplantation, such as ovary, testicle, penis, and vagina is prohibited in Islam [5]. Due to this prohibition, HT might face strong objection from Muslim scholars.

The religious concerns on HT may hamper it's improvement in future. From the Islamic corner, there has been no fatwas pertaining HT until now. However, reproductive challenges is high likely to lead Muslim scholars to prohibit HT.

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Khaled Tafran is the sole author of this article.

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