

**OPTN/UNOS Ethics Committee
Meeting Minutes
September 21, 2017
Conference Call**

**Elisa Gordon, PhD, MPH, Chair
Keren Ladin, PhD, Vice Chair**

Introduction

The Ethics Committee met via Citrix GoToTraining teleconference on 09/21/2017 to discuss the following agenda items:

1. Enhancing Liver Distribution Proposal
2. Other Significant Items

The following is a summary of the Committee's discussions.

1. Enhancing Liver Distribution Proposal

The vice Chair of the Liver Committee led a presentation on the Enhancing Liver Distribution proposal that is out for public comment.

Summary of discussion:

The Ethics Committee (the Committee) heard a presentation on the Enhancing Liver Distribution Proposal from the vice Chair of the Liver Committee. Following the presentation, Committee members raised several questions which were address by the presenter.

A member questioned what does the liver community envision as the benefit of using proximity circles for liver allocation? The Liver Committee vice Chair used the example of a proximity circle centered around a donor hospital in Philadelphia. The transplant community in Philadelphia (Region 2) expects to lose livers for transplant to the New York City area (Region 2). However, transplant hospitals in the Philadelphia area will have new access to potential liver donors in northern Virginia (Region 11). In general, areas that may gain more livers for transplant support the proposal and those areas that may have less livers available for transplant oppose the proposal. Transplant centers that may receive fewer organs may be forced to expand their acceptance criteria and to accept more marginal organs.

A member questioned if potential changes in the liver allocation system should be delayed until we learn the effects of implementing a National Liver Review Board (NLRB) and changes to hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) policy might have on access to transplant. The presenter responded that the new NLRB should help address disparity and new HCC policy should reduce the number of HCC related liver transplants. However, the Final Rule requires this problem be addressed through changes to the liver allocation system. The Final Rule requires a system that prioritizes a patient's need for organ transplant over their proximity to the donor.

A member questioned if OPOs in regions with high MELD scores at time of transplant are underperforming due to poor OPO performance compared to OPOs in regions with lower MELD scores at the time of transplant. Could problems with the current liver allocation system be addressed by making OPOs more effective? The Liver Committee vice Chair agreed that it may be a contributing factor, and OPO performance varies between regions, but there is currently no specific mechanism in place to improve underperforming OPOs.

A member questioned how the proximity circles are determined. The proximity circles are based on a distance of 150 nautical miles from the hospital with a potential liver donor. It would be too complicated to base the proximity circles on the potential liver donor's place of residence.

A member questioned if there has been modeling to evaluate if there might be unintended consequences such as exacerbation to racial and ethnic disparities to transplant under the proposed changes to the liver allocation system. The vice Chair of the Liver Committee commented that the proposal may negatively impact rural area. Wider sharing of livers will move more livers for transplant to suburban and more densely populated areas.

A member commented that the projected 5 % increase in transport of livers for transplant increases risk for medical staff and increased costs.

A member commented that the Liver Committee should be commended for recognizing the importance of equity in the current proposal.

A member commented that previous proposals were expected to result in higher MELD scores at the time of transplant and decrease the total number of transplants. The current proposal improves equity without compromising utility.

The Committee recommends that it will be important to monitor how the proposal might impact socioeconomic status (SES) measures (e.g., race/ethnicity, education, and financial status). Person living in rural areas might not be considered as candidates for transplant.

Next steps:

The Committee will prepare and submit comments regarding the proposal.

2. Other Significant Items

The Committee will meet at UNOS headquarters in Richmond, Virginia, on Monday, October 2, 2017. This will be the first time the Committee will meet at UNOS headquarters.

Upcoming Meeting

- October 2, 2017