

Update from Yolanda Becker, M.D., re: OPTN and geographic distribution

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From: Yolanda Becker, M.D., President, OPTN/UNOS Board of Directors

To: Transplant program directors
Transplant program administrators
OPO chief executive officers/executive directors
OPO procurement administrators/managers
HLA laboratory directors

Here is an update on events and issues relating to geography in organ distribution.

The OPTN/UNOS Board met last week. As I mentioned in the June 6 memo, the Board took up a set of principles of organ distribution as recommended by the Ad Hoc Geography Committee. The Board approved the principles by a vote of 32 in favor and five opposed.

The principles statement is as follows:

Deceased donor organs are a national resource to be distributed as broadly as feasible. Any geographic constraints pertaining to the principles of organ distribution must be rationally determined and consistently applied.

Geographic distribution may be constrained in order to:

1. Reduce inherent differences in the ratio of donor supply and demand across the country
2. Reduce travel time expected to have a clinically significant effect on ischemic time and organ quality
3. Increase organ utilization and prevent organ wastage
4. Increase efficiencies of donation and transplant system resources

The Board had a robust discussion of other vital issues that organ allocation policy should address. In particular, we discussed the emphasis in other sections of the Final Rule to reduce inequity in transplant access for potentially vulnerable populations, such as the disadvantaged in socioeconomic status and pediatric patients. These are also important issues, and they neither conflict with the geographic principles nor are they mutually exclusive. They are not included among the considerations that may serve as the basis for constraining broader distribution. As we go forward as a community, we will continue to address the needs of vulnerable populations as we also address issues of geography.

We need your collective feedback to address the Ad Hoc Geography Committee's second directive, establishing frameworks or models for incorporating these principles into policy, to our community for feedback. The committee is recommending three potential frameworks, consistent with the guiding principles, to help us ensure that future distribution policy is consistent with the principles. We will be sharing more information on each of the frameworks, and we will seek your input on them through public comment beginning in August and discussion at the Fall regional meetings (the meeting schedule will soon be available [here](#)). We have already created several [informational resources](#) to help you understand the context of our efforts, and we'll be adding more resources and sending you more updates in coming weeks.

In a different but not entirely unrelated action, the OPTN/UNOS Board voted to retain the [lung distribution policy](#) that the Executive Committee adopted on an emergent basis in November 2017. As with any organ-specific policy, it is not set in stone. The Thoracic Organ Transplantation Committee will continue to study its effects and bring any proposed refinements to the community for public comment. However, the Board concluded that the current distribution system is more consistent with the newly adopted principles than the prior policy was. And going forward, all organ-specific distribution policies will be considered according to the principles statement.

The Board also discussed another developing issue relating to distribution policy. HRSA has asked the OPTN to address issues relating to correspondence from the same legal firm that initiated the action leading to the change in lung allocation policy. This inquiry raises concerns with liver distribution policy, both as it exists currently and as it will be updated based on policies the Board approved in late 2017. We are working on a reply to the HRSA correspondence with insights from the Liver and Intestinal Organ Transplantation Committee and Policy Oversight Committee. That reply is not final as of this time. We will keep you informed as events warrant on this issue.

As always, thank you for your attention to these important issues.