

## New transplant rules to protect living donors

Last Updated: 2002-12-20 16:21:56 -0400 (Reuters Health)

By Martin F. Downs

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - A panel of experts has approved new rules for live-donor liver transplants in New York state, aimed at improving safety for donors.

The panel, convened to advise New York State Department of Health Commissioner Antonia Novello, unanimously approved the guidelines on Thursday. A spokesman for the health department, Robert Kenny, told Reuters Health that it will be "a top priority of Commissioner Novello to begin implementation."

Drafting of the guidelines was prompted by the death of Michael Hurewitz, 57, earlier this year at New York City's Mount Sinai Medical Center, after he donated a piece of his liver to his brother. An investigation found that poor care following the surgery was to blame for Hurewitz's death.

"The after-care was woefully inadequate," Kenny said.

One issue in Hurewitz's case was a shortage of medical staff in the ward where he had been recovering. The new rules mandate that during the first 24 hours after a transplant, one nurse must be on duty for every two patients. Later on, there must be one nurse available to care for every four patients. Also, doctors must be notified of any problems with a patient within 30 minutes, and doctors must be available to respond to emergencies at all times.

The guidelines also call for independent teams to act on behalf of living donors. The teams should be made up of at least a physician who specializes in internal medicine, a nurse clinician to act as transplant coordinator, and a medical social worker, who may seek advice from a psychiatrist or a medical ethicist. This team will explain the risks of transplantation to the potential donor; and they may, if they see fit, deny the donor's wishes after evaluating the case. There will be a mandatory 2-week "reflection and reaffirmation period" before the donor can finally agree to the operation.

"They're the most comprehensive regulations in the country," said Dr. Lewis Teperman, director of transplantation at New York University Medical Center, in an interview with Reuters Health. Teperman served on the panel that drafted the rules. "I believe this will be the blueprint that the rest of the country follows," he said.

Kenny said the regulations could be enacted as early as April 2003.

Shortly after Hurewitz died on January 13, Mount Sinai voluntarily ceased live-donor transplants, before the state forced them to do so. "They're working toward improving," Kenny said. Officials will visit the hospital for an

unannounced inspection sometime in January 2003, and if improvements are deemed satisfactory, the ban may be lifted. "If there are issues, it will not be lifted," Kenny said.

"We're hopeful," said Dr. Leona Kim, director of Mount Sinai's Recanti-Miller Transplantation Institute, in an interview with Reuters Health.

She said she wholly supports the rules proposed in the Department of Health's document. "It should be put into place," she said. She was especially enthusiastic about creating teams of donor advocates. "That is one of the best things to come out of the document," she said.

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