

Tracey ELLIOTT: Should scarce human organs be donated to Jehovah's Witnesses?

It is well known that Jehovah's Witnesses will not accept blood transfusions because, according to their beliefs, the Bible commands them not to ingest whole blood or its primary components in any form. If a Jehovah's Witness voluntarily accepts a blood transplant, they are no longer to be regarded as being a member of the faith, and this may have profound implications for their place within their community. Originally, religious guidance also forbade Jehovah's Witnesses from having organ transplants, but this was revised in the 1980s and the decision is now regarded as being one of personal choice, although the prohibition against blood transfusions remains. Jehovah's Witness patients have been undergoing bloodless transplant surgery since the 1980s and reported studies indicate that these patients do not have materially poorer mortality and morbidity outcomes than non-Jehovah's Witness transplant patients. A number of legal and ethical implications arise from such surgery, but this poster will identify and critically examine the key legal and ethical difficulties in relation to the three most significant issues: first, ensuring that decisions to refuse (or accept) blood transfusions are voluntary; second, the issue of confidentiality, and finally, the issue of justice: should scarce organs be donated to those who refuse to take advantage of potentially life-saving procedures?