

# Hepatic Haven

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## Special Edition: Ethical Organ Harvesting, Transplantation Ethics, and the Protection of Human Dignity

### Featuring: Jan Jekielek and his book *Killed to Order*

#### **Why Ethics Matter in Organ Transplantation**

Modern organ transplantation is one of the greatest achievements in the history of medicine. Every day, donated organs provide a second chance at life for individuals suffering from end-stage liver disease, heart failure, kidney failure, and other life-threatening conditions. As a liver transplant recipient myself, I understand firsthand the profound gift that transplantation represents. It is not simply a medical procedure—it is a miracle made possible through science, compassion, and generosity.

At the heart of every successful transplant is an extraordinary act of human kindness: organ donation. Donors and their families make selfless decisions that save lives and restore hope to people they may never meet. Their generosity creates a bond between strangers and demonstrates the very best of humanity.

The success of transplantation, however, depends upon something that is often overlooked—public trust. Patients must trust that organs are obtained ethically. Donor families must trust that their loved ones are treated with dignity and respect. Physicians and transplant professionals must uphold the highest standards of medical ethics. Without trust, the entire transplant system is placed at risk.

This is why ethical principles such as informed consent, transparency, accountability, and the Dead Donor Rule are so important. These safeguards exist to protect both donors and recipients. They ensure that organs are donated freely, that human dignity is respected, and that transplantation remains a life-saving medical practice guided by compassion and integrity.

In recent years, growing concerns have been raised regarding allegations of forced organ harvesting in certain parts of the world. Investigative journalists, physicians, human rights advocates, and policymakers have called for greater awareness and scrutiny of these allegations. Understanding these concerns is essential not only from a humanitarian perspective but also because they challenge the ethical foundations upon which transplantation is built.

In this special edition of *Hepatic Haven*, we explore these issues through the lens of medicine, ethics, and human rights. Our goal is not only to inform, but also to encourage thoughtful discussion about protecting the integrity of transplantation for future generations.

**"To save one life is to save an entire world."**

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**Editorial****EDITORIAL****Why This Conversation Cannot Be Ignored**

For most transplant recipients, the journey begins with a simple hope: the hope of surviving long enough to receive a life-saving organ. During that journey, patients place enormous trust in physicians, hospitals, organ procurement organizations, and the systems that govern transplantation. Few of us stop to consider the complex ethical foundations that make that trust possible.

Yet those foundations matter.

Every successful transplant is built upon a social contract. Society agrees to support organ donation because donors are treated with dignity, families are respected, and organs are allocated according to established ethical principles. When those principles are followed, transplantation becomes one of medicine's greatest success stories. When they are questioned, confidence in the entire system can be threatened.

This issue of Hepatic Haven examines one of the most challenging topics in modern medicine: allegations of forced organ harvesting and the concerns raised by investigators, journalists, human rights advocates, and medical professionals. Regardless of one's perspective, these allegations deserve thoughtful examination because they touch upon the core values that guide ethical transplantation throughout the world.

As transplant recipients and caregivers, we have a unique responsibility to understand not only how organs save lives but also how they are obtained. Education is not about creating fear; it is about preserving trust. Transparency strengthens donation programs, protects vulnerable individuals, and reinforces the integrity of the transplant community.

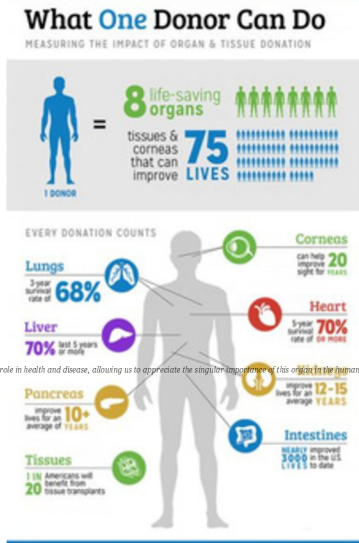
Throughout this special edition, readers will encounter stories, interviews, and investigations that raise important questions about ethics, accountability, and human dignity. We encourage you to approach these topics with an open mind, a critical eye, and a commitment to the values that make transplantation possible. The future of transplantation depends not only on medical innovation but also on our willingness to defend the ethical principles that give every donated organ its

meaning.

## THE GIFT OF ORGAN DONATION: MEDICINE AT ITS BEST

Organ transplantation stands among the greatest achievements in the history of medicine. For patients suffering from end-stage liver disease, kidney failure, heart failure, or other life-threatening conditions, transplantation offers something that once seemed impossible: the opportunity for a renewed life. Every successful transplant represents the culmination of scientific discovery, surgical skill, and, most importantly, human generosity.

The history of transplantation is a remarkable story of perseverance and innovation. Throughout the early twentieth century, surgeons attempted organ transplantation with limited success because the body's immune system recognized transplanted organs as foreign and attacked them. A major breakthrough occurred in 1954 when Dr. Joseph Murray performed the world's first successful kidney transplant between identical twins. This historic operation demonstrated that transplantation could work under the right circumstances. Over the following decades, advances in tissue matching, organ preservation, and immunosuppressive medications dramatically improved outcomes. Today, liver, kidney, heart, lung, pancreas, and intestinal transplantation have become established treatments that save thousands of lives each year.



Most organ transplants originate from deceased donors. When an individual suffers a catastrophic brain injury or other devastating medical event and is declared dead according to accepted medical and legal standards, the possibility of organ donation may be discussed with the family or authorized representatives. If consent for donation is confirmed, specially trained medical professionals evaluate the donor's organs to determine whether they are suitable for transplantation. Organs that meet strict medical criteria are carefully recovered in an operating room, preserved, and transported to transplant centers where recipients are waiting. This process requires extraordinary coordination among physicians, nurses, organ procurement organizations, transportation teams, and transplant surgeons, often within a matter of hours. Living donation provides another powerful example of human compassion. Healthy individuals can donate one kidney and continue to live normal lives. Similarly, a portion of the liver can be donated because the liver possesses a unique ability to regenerate. Living donor transplantation offers several advantages, including shorter waiting times and the ability to schedule surgery under optimal conditions. Many recipients receive life-saving transplants from family members, friends, or altruistic donors who simply wish to help another human being.

Because donated organs are scarce and precious, the allocation process must be fair, transparent, and based on medical need. In the United States, organs are not allocated according to wealth, social status, race, or political influence. Instead, allocation policies consider objective factors such as blood type compatibility, medical urgency, waiting time, organ size, geographic considerations, and the likelihood of successful transplantation. For liver transplantation, the MELD score helps determine priority by estimating the severity of liver disease and the risk of death without a transplant.

The Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) plays a central role in maintaining this system. Established by federal law, the OPTN oversees the nation's organ donation and transplantation network, develops allocation policies, monitors outcomes, and works to ensure fairness and accountability. Through continuous review and policy development, the OPTN seeks to maximize both equity and patient outcomes.

The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) has historically served as the contractor responsible for operating many aspects of the national transplant system and supporting the complex technology that matches donated organs with recipients. Together, transplant centers, organ procurement organizations, the OPTN, and UNOS have helped create one of the most sophisticated transplant systems in the world.

For transplant recipients, every donated organ represents far more than a medical procedure. It represents a family's decision to transform tragedy into hope. It represents the dedication of healthcare professionals who work around the clock to save lives. Most importantly, it represents the extraordinary generosity of donors whose final gift allows others to watch children grow, celebrate milestones, and enjoy years that otherwise might have been lost. As discussions about transplant ethics continue around the world, it is important to remember what ethical organ donation makes possible. The gift of organ donation is medicine at its very best—a partnership of science, compassion, trust, and human dignity that saves lives every day.

## A Liver Recipient's Perspective

As a liver transplant recipient, I understand the profound impact that organ donation can have on a person's life. Several years ago, I was facing the devastating reality of end-stage liver disease caused by nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH). My health steadily declined as complications developed, including hepatic encephalopathy, fatigue, weakness, and cognitive difficulties. Eventually, I was told that a liver transplant was my only chance for survival.

The waiting period was filled with uncertainty. Like thousands of patients on transplant waiting lists, I hoped that an organ would become available before it was too late. On February 23, 2021, that call finally came. A donor liver had become available, and I was given a second chance at life.

My journey after transplantation was not easy. I faced multiple complications, lengthy hospitalizations, and months of rehabilitation. Yet through it all, I never forgot the incredible gift that made my recovery possible. Somewhere, a family made the selfless decision to donate their loved one's organs during one of the most difficult moments of their lives.

Today, I view every day as a gift. My transplant allowed me to spend more time with my wife, family, and friends and to continue educating others through LiverTransplantGuide.com and Hepatic Haven. My story is a reminder that behind every transplant statistic is a human life transformed by the generosity of an organ donor.

For transplant recipients like me, organ donation is not merely a medical procedure—it is the gift of hope, time, and a future that otherwise might never have existed.

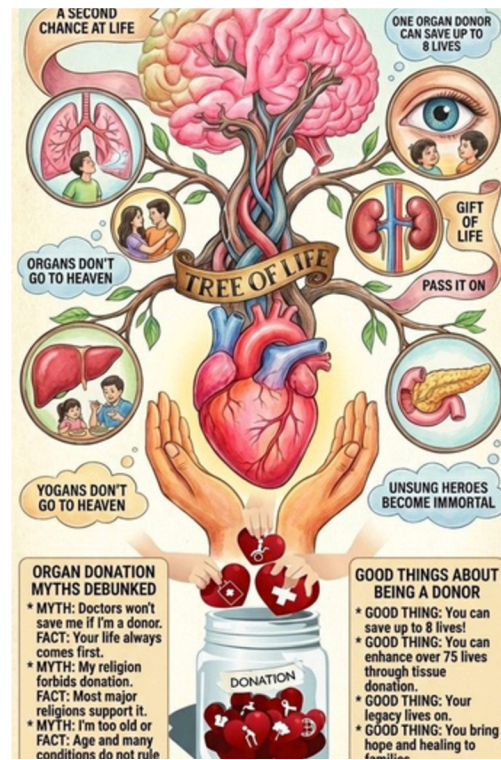
## THE FOUNDATION OF MODERN TRANSPLANT ETHICS

Organ transplantation is one of the most remarkable achievements in modern medicine, saving thousands of lives each year. However, the success of transplantation depends not only on surgical expertise and medical innovation but also on a strong ethical framework that protects donors, recipients, families, and society as a whole. Public trust in transplantation is built upon principles that ensure organs are obtained and allocated fairly, transparently, and with respect for human dignity.

### The Dead Donor Rule

At the heart of transplant ethics is the Dead Donor Rule, a fundamental principle that has guided organ transplantation for decades. The rule states that organ procurement must not begin until a donor has been declared dead according to accepted medical and legal standards. Equally important, the act of removing organs must not be the cause of the donor's death.

This principle exists to protect vulnerable individuals and maintain public confidence in the transplant system. Patients and families must know that physicians will always prioritize the care of the patient and will never compromise medical treatment in order to obtain organs for transplantation. The Dead Donor Rule creates a clear ethical boundary between end-of-life care and organ recovery. The development of this rule evolved alongside advances in critical care medicine and transplantation. During the mid-twentieth century, improvements in life support technology made it possible to maintain circulation and respiration even after catastrophic brain



injury. As organ transplantation expanded, medical and legal communities developed standards for determining death, including neurological criteria commonly referred to as brain death. These standards helped establish a consistent ethical framework that remains central to transplantation today.

### Informed Consent

Another cornerstone of transplant ethics is informed consent. Consent ensures that decisions regarding organ donation are voluntary, informed, and free from coercion.

Donor rights are central to this process. Individuals who choose to become organ donors have the right to make that decision freely and with an understanding of what donation involves. In the case of living donation, potential donors undergo extensive medical and psychological evaluations to ensure they understand the risks and benefits and are acting voluntarily.

Families also have important rights. When a deceased individual becomes a potential donor, family members are often involved in discussions regarding donation. Healthcare professionals provide information, answer questions, and support families during an emotionally difficult time. Respect for family concerns and cultural values is an important component of ethical donation practices.

Recipients have rights as well. Patients awaiting transplantation deserve assurance that organs are obtained ethically and allocated according to established medical criteria. Recipients must also provide informed consent for transplantation, understanding both the benefits and risks of the procedure, including the need for lifelong medical follow-up and immunosuppressive therapy.

### Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are essential to maintaining public trust in transplantation. Organ donation and allocation systems must operate according to clearly defined policies that are open to public review and professional oversight.

In the United States, transplant centers, organ procurement organizations, and regulatory agencies are subject to rigorous monitoring and reporting requirements. Outcomes are tracked, policies are regularly reviewed, and ethical concerns are investigated. These safeguards help ensure that organs are allocated fairly and that transplantation programs maintain high standards of performance and integrity.

Accountability also extends to healthcare professionals, researchers, policymakers, and institutions involved in transplantation. Ethical concerns must be addressed openly, and allegations of misconduct must be thoroughly investigated. Transparency promotes confidence in the system and reinforces the principle that human dignity remains paramount.

As transplantation continues to evolve, the ethical principles of the Dead Donor Rule, informed consent, transparency, and accountability remain the foundation upon which public trust is built. These safeguards protect donors, recipients, and families while ensuring that the lifesaving gift of organ donation remains grounded in respect, compassion, and ethical responsibility.



### WHAT IS FORCED ORGAN HARVESTING?

Organ transplantation is one of medicine's greatest achievements, saving thousands of lives each year through the generous gift of organ donation. However, discussions about transplantation ethics sometimes raise concerns about a practice known as forced organ harvesting. Understanding this issue is important because it highlights the ethical principles that must guide all organ donation and transplantation programs.

#### Definition

Forced organ harvesting refers to the removal of organs from individuals without their free and informed consent. In its most serious form, the term is used to describe allegations that organs have been taken from prisoners, detainees, or other vulnerable individuals who were unable to voluntarily consent to donation. Such practices would violate fundamental principles of medical ethics, human rights, and international law.

The ethical foundation of transplantation requires that organs be donated voluntarily and that donors—or their authorized representatives—provide informed consent. When consent is absent, coerced, or impossible to verify, the legitimacy of the transplantation process is called into question.

#### Distinction from Voluntary Donation

Voluntary organ donation is based on respect for human dignity and personal choice. In countries with established transplant systems, organs are generally obtained from deceased donors who previously registered as donors or whose families authorize donation after death. Living donation is also permitted in many countries when donors voluntarily choose to donate a kidney or part of their liver.

Forced organ harvesting differs fundamentally from voluntary donation because it involves coercion, lack of consent, or the inability to independently verify consent. Ethical transplantation requires transparency, documentation, and safeguards that protect both donors and recipients.

#### International Concerns

Over the past two decades, concerns about forced organ harvesting have been raised by journalists, researchers, human rights organizations, physicians, and governmental bodies. Much of the international attention has focused on allegations involving prisoners and detainees in China.

Chinese authorities have stated that reforms implemented beginning in 2015 ended the use of organs from executed prisoners and established a voluntary donation system. However, some investigators, advocacy groups, and independent researchers have argued that questions remain regarding transparency, donor sourcing, and independent verification of transplant practices.

Several governments and organizations have expressed concern about these allegations. Legislative bodies in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the European Union have debated or adopted measures addressing transplant tourism and the possibility of receiving organs obtained through unethical means.

Other countries have implemented safeguards to prevent citizens from participating in unethical transplant practices abroad. For example:

- Israel prohibits insurance reimbursement for transplant procedures performed using illegally obtained organs.
- Spain has strengthened laws addressing organ trafficking and transplant-related crimes.
- Taiwan requires patients who receive transplants overseas to report information about the transplant source and hospital.
- The United States has enacted measures intended to address concerns about forced organ harvesting and organ trafficking through sanctions and reporting requirements.

#### Human Rights Implications

If forced organ harvesting occurs, it represents a profound violation of human rights. International human rights principles recognize the right to life, bodily integrity, freedom from coercion, and protection from cruel or degrading treatment. Removing organs without valid consent would violate each of these principles.

The issue also extends beyond individual victims. Public trust is essential for successful organ donation programs. When ethical concerns arise, confidence in transplantation systems can be undermined, potentially affecting donation rates and public support.

For this reason, organizations such as the World Health Organization, World Medical Association, and The Transplantation Society have emphasized the importance of voluntary donation, informed consent, transparency, and independent oversight.

#### Looking Forward

The overwhelming majority of organ transplants performed in established donation systems throughout North America, Europe, Australia, and many other regions occur within carefully regulated ethical frameworks. Nevertheless, allegations of forced organ harvesting continue to generate international concern and debate. Ongoing transparency, independent oversight, and adherence to ethical principles remain essential to maintaining public trust and protecting the integrity of transplantation worldwide.

#### MYTH VS. REALITY

Myth: Organ transplantation is ethically identical everywhere.

Reality: While most countries embrace common ethical principles such as informed consent and donor protection, legal frameworks, oversight mechanisms, transparency standards, and reporting requirements vary considerably among nations. Understanding these differences is essential when evaluating transplantation practices around the world.



## **FEATURE PROFILE**

### **JAN JEKIELEK AND KILLED TO ORDER**

#### **Investigating One of the Most Controversial Questions in Modern Medicine**

In the world of investigative journalism, few subjects are as challenging—or as consequential—as allegations involving medical ethics, human rights, and organ transplantation. For more than a decade, journalist Jan Jekielek has been one of the most prominent voices examining allegations of forced organ harvesting and the broader ethical questions surrounding transplantation practices in China. His book, *Killed to Order: The Human Cost of Organ Harvesting in China*, brought together years of research, interviews, and investigative reporting into a comprehensive examination of one of the most controversial issues in modern medicine.

#### **From Journalist to Investigator**

Jan Jekielek is best known as an investigative journalist, interviewer, and commentator whose work has focused on human rights, international affairs, and issues often overlooked by mainstream media. Throughout his career, he has conducted hundreds of interviews with experts, government officials, academics, physicians, and witnesses from around the world.

His interest in organ transplantation ethics emerged through his reporting on human rights issues in China. As he examined reports involving prisoners of conscience, religious minorities, and political detainees, he repeatedly encountered allegations that some individuals may have been targeted as sources for organ procurement. These allegations raised profound questions not only about human rights but also about the ethical foundations of transplantation itself.

For Jekielek, the issue was not simply political. It was deeply human. If true, the allegations would challenge some of the most fundamental principles of modern medicine, including informed consent, respect for human dignity, and the longstanding ethical requirement that organ donation be voluntary.

#### **Why Investigate Transplant Ethics?**

Most people view organ transplantation as one of medicine's greatest success stories—and rightly so. Every year, thousands of patients receive life-saving organs from generous donors and their families. Yet the very success of transplantation depends upon public trust.

Jekielek recognized that allegations involving forced organ harvesting were not merely a regional issue. They had implications for the global transplant community. If organs could be obtained without valid consent, it would undermine the ethical framework that protects donors, recipients, and healthcare professionals throughout the world.

As his research expanded, he sought answers from experts in medicine, law, ethics, and international human rights. The result was a years-long effort to document what was known, what remained disputed, and what questions still required investigation.



### **The Development of Killed to Order**

Killed to Order did not emerge from a single investigation. Rather, it developed from years of interviews, documentary projects, policy discussions, and examination of available evidence.

The book explores allegations that prisoners of conscience in China—including practitioners of Falun Gong and members of other detained groups—were subjected to systematic medical testing that some investigators believed could be related to organ matching and transplantation.

Jekielek assembled testimony from researchers, physicians, former detainees, investigators, and human rights advocates. He examined transplant statistics, waiting times, hospital reports, government statements, and independent investigations that sought to determine whether organ procurement practices were consistent with accepted international ethical standards.

Importantly, the book attempts to present not only allegations but also the broader context in which those allegations emerged, allowing readers to understand the complexity of the issue.

#### **Major Themes of the Book**

Several themes run throughout Killed to Order.

The first is the importance of informed consent. Ethical transplantation depends on voluntary donation. Without consent, organ procurement becomes fundamentally incompatible with modern medical ethics.

The second theme is transparency. Jekielek repeatedly emphasizes the need for independent verification and accountability in transplant systems. Transparency allows both physicians and the public to have confidence in how organs are obtained and allocated.

A third theme is the intersection of medicine and human rights. The book argues that medical practices cannot be separated from broader ethical considerations. Scientific achievement alone is insufficient if human dignity is not protected.

Finally, the book explores the responsibility of the international community. If credible allegations of abuse exist, governments, medical organizations, and professional societies must determine how to respond.

#### **Interviews with Physicians, Investigators, and Survivors**

One of the strengths of Killed to Order is its reliance on extensive interviews. Rather than presenting a single perspective, Jekielek incorporates the views of transplant surgeons, ethicists, human rights researchers, legal experts, former detainees, and investigative journalists.

These interviews provide readers with insight into how allegations are investigated, how transplant systems function, and why ethical safeguards are so important. Physicians discuss accepted standards of transplantation. Investigators describe the challenges of gathering evidence. Survivors and former detainees provide personal accounts that help humanize a subject often discussed only in statistics and policy reports.

Together, these voices create a multidimensional portrait of an issue that remains the subject of ongoing international debate.

#### **Impact on Public Awareness**

Perhaps the greatest impact of Killed to Order has been its role in increasing public awareness. Many people outside the transplant community had never considered where organs originate or how ethical standards are enforced. The book encouraged readers to ask important questions about consent, transparency, and accountability.

It also contributed to broader discussions among policymakers, human rights advocates, and medical organizations regarding transplant ethics and international oversight. Whether readers agree with every conclusion or not, the book has succeeded in drawing attention to questions that many believe deserve careful examination.

For transplant recipients, healthcare professionals, and members of the public, Killed to Order serves as a reminder that the success of transplantation depends on more than medical expertise. It depends on ethical principles that protect donors, recipients, and society as a whole.

"Ethics are not an obstacle to transplantation; they are its foundation."

As the global transplant community continues to evolve, that principle remains as important today as ever. The lifesaving gift of organ donation derives its value not only from the lives it saves, but also from the ethical standards that make public trust possible.



## VIDEO SPOTLIGHT

### DR. PHIL MCGRAW INTERVIEWS JAN JEKIELEK

#### **A Conversation About Organ Transplantation, Human Rights, and Public Awareness**

In a compelling and thought-provoking interview, Dr. Phil McGraw sat down with investigative journalist Jan Jekielek to discuss one of the most controversial issues in modern medicine: allegations of forced organ harvesting and the ethical questions surrounding organ transplantation practices in China. The discussion brought a complex and often overlooked topic to a broad public audience, highlighting concerns that have been raised by journalists, physicians, human rights advocates, and policymakers for more than two decades. Known for addressing difficult social issues, Dr. Phil approached the subject from a humanitarian perspective, asking questions that many viewers might ask themselves. How are organs obtained? What ethical safeguards exist to protect donors? What happens when transparency is lacking? And why should ordinary citizens care about allegations occurring thousands of miles away?

#### Overview of the Discussion

During the interview, Jan Jekielek summarized years of investigative reporting that ultimately led to the publication of his book *Killed to Order*. He described allegations that prisoners of conscience and other detained individuals in China may have been used as involuntary sources of organs for transplantation. The discussion explored reports from independent researchers, former detainees, physicians, and human rights organizations. Jekielek emphasized that concerns have focused on whether organs were obtained without valid consent and whether transplant statistics and waiting times could be fully explained by voluntary donation systems alone.

Dr. Phil repeatedly returned to a central theme: the importance of transparency. Without independent verification and accountability, he noted, public confidence in any medical system becomes difficult to maintain.

#### **Major Allegations Discussed**

The interview reviewed several allegations that have been examined by investigators and human rights advocates:

- The use of prisoners as potential organ sources.
- Reports of unusually short transplant waiting times.
- Questions regarding donor sourcing and consent.
- Allegations involving prisoners of conscience and detained minority groups.
- The need for independent review and verification of transplant practices.

Jekielek stressed that these allegations have generated international concern and have been the subject of reports, hearings, and investigations in multiple countries.

#### **Human Rights Concerns**

A significant portion of the discussion focused on human rights.

At the center of the controversy is the principle of informed consent. Ethical transplantation requires that organ donation be voluntary and free from coercion. If organs are procured without valid consent, fundamental human rights are violated.

The interview highlighted concerns raised by medical ethicists and human rights organizations regarding bodily autonomy, freedom from coercion, and respect for human dignity. These principles are recognized by international medical organizations and form the foundation of ethical transplantation worldwide.

Dr. Phil emphasized that human rights concerns should not be viewed solely as political issues. Rather, they are humanitarian issues that affect the credibility and integrity of medical practice itself.

## **Why Public Awareness Matters**

One of the most important messages from the interview was the value of public awareness.

Many transplant recipients and members of the public never think about how organs become available for transplantation. In countries with established donation systems, people often assume that all organs come from voluntary donors and that ethical safeguards are universally applied.

The interview challenged viewers to understand that ethical standards can vary among nations and healthcare systems. Public awareness encourages transparency, supports ethical reforms, and helps maintain trust in legitimate organ donation programs.

According to Jekielek, awareness is not about creating fear. It is about ensuring that transplantation continues to be grounded in ethical principles that protect both donors and recipients.

**What Does This Mean for Transplant Recipients?**

For transplant recipients, discussions about forced organ harvesting can be uncomfortable. Organ transplantation is one of medicine's greatest achievements and has saved countless lives around the world.

The interview emphasized that ethical concerns in one part of the world should not diminish confidence in legitimate transplant systems that operate under strict oversight and regulatory safeguards. Instead, such discussions remind recipients of the importance of maintaining high ethical standards everywhere.

Recipients benefit when donation systems are transparent, accountable, and based upon voluntary consent. These principles protect not only donors but also the integrity of transplantation itself.

## **What We Learned**

### **Transparency Matters**

Public trust depends upon transparency. Donation practices, donor sources, and allocation systems must be open to independent review and oversight.

### **Ethical Safeguards Matter**

The Dead Donor Rule, informed consent, donor protections, and independent monitoring are not bureaucratic obstacles. They are essential safeguards that protect human dignity and maintain confidence in transplantation.

### **Public Awareness Drives Reform**

History has repeatedly shown that awareness can lead to change. Investigative journalism, public discussion, and professional scrutiny help ensure that ethical standards remain at the center of medical practice.

### **Final Thoughts**

The conversation between Dr. Phil McGraw and Jan Jekielek brought a difficult but important subject to a wide audience. Whether one approaches the issue from a medical, ethical, legal, or humanitarian perspective, the discussion reinforces a central truth: transplantation can only maintain public trust when it is grounded in transparency, accountability, and respect for human dignity.

For transplant recipients, donors, families, and healthcare professionals alike, that message remains as important as the gift of transplantation itself.



## VIDEO SPOTLIGHT

### SEAN SPICER INTERVIEWS JAN JEKIELEK

#### **Examining Killed to Order, Human Rights, and the Future of Transplant Ethics**

In a wide-ranging interview, Sean Spicer sat down with investigative journalist Jan Jekielek to discuss the findings presented in *Killed to Order* and the growing international concern regarding allegations of forced organ harvesting in China. Their conversation explored not only the evidence and investigations that have emerged over the past two decades but also the broader implications for governments, medical professionals, policymakers, and transplant recipients worldwide.

Unlike discussions that focus exclusively on medical ethics, the Spicer-Jekielek interview examined the issue through the additional lenses of public policy, international relations, and human rights. The result was a conversation that challenged viewers to consider how allegations involving organ procurement affect not only individual patients but also the credibility of healthcare systems and the responsibilities of democratic societies.

#### **Discussing Killed to Order**

A major focus of the interview was Jekielek's book, *Killed to Order*, which chronicles years of investigative reporting into allegations that prisoners of conscience and detained individuals may have been used as involuntary sources of organs.

Jekielek explained how his investigation evolved over many years through interviews with physicians, former detainees, researchers, human rights advocates, and legal experts. He described efforts to analyze transplant data, hospital reports, government statements, and testimony from witnesses who claimed to have firsthand knowledge of the issue.

Throughout the discussion, Jekielek emphasized that the book is fundamentally about ethics and accountability. While the allegations remain controversial, he argued that they warrant careful examination because they involve questions central to modern medicine: consent, transparency, and human dignity.

#### **The International Response**

The interview also explored how governments and international organizations have responded to allegations of forced organ harvesting. Over the years, concerns have been raised by lawmakers, human rights organizations, medical ethicists, and investigative bodies in multiple countries. Various governmental hearings, parliamentary discussions, and policy initiatives have sought to better understand the allegations and determine appropriate responses.

Spicer noted that the issue has gradually moved from a relatively obscure topic to one receiving increased international attention. The discussion highlighted how public awareness campaigns, investigative journalism, and independent research have contributed to a broader global conversation regarding transplant ethics.

The interview also addressed actions taken by countries such as the United States, Canada, Israel, Taiwan, and members of the European Union to strengthen oversight of transplant tourism and discourage participation in potentially unethical organ procurement practices.

**Policy Implications**  
One of the most significant themes of the conversation was the role of public policy.

If allegations of forced organ harvesting are credible, policymakers face difficult questions regarding sanctions, international cooperation, medical exchanges, and transplant tourism. Governments must determine how to balance diplomatic considerations with human rights concerns.

Jekielek argued that ethical standards should not stop at national borders. Just as international agreements address human trafficking and other human rights abuses, transplant ethics requires international vigilance and cooperation.

The interview suggested that policymakers have a responsibility to ensure that citizens are informed about ethical risks associated with overseas transplantation and to support efforts that promote transparency in global transplant systems.

#### **Why Physicians Should Be Informed**

A particularly important segment of the interview focused on healthcare professionals.

Physicians occupy a unique position in discussions about transplantation ethics. They are entrusted with protecting patients, promoting ethical medical practices, and maintaining public confidence in healthcare systems.

Jekielek emphasized that physicians do not need to become political advocates to recognize the importance of ethical oversight. Rather, they should understand the ethical foundations that support transplantation and remain informed about concerns raised by international investigations.

For transplant surgeons, hepatologists, nephrologists, intensivists, and transplant coordinators, awareness of global ethical issues helps reinforce the principles that govern responsible transplantation: informed consent, donor protection, transparency, and accountability.

Healthcare professionals also play an important role in educating patients who may have questions about transplantation practices in other countries.

### **Key Takeaways**

#### **The Importance of Independent Investigation**

The interview repeatedly emphasized that allegations involving organ procurement should be examined through objective and independent investigation. Reliable conclusions depend upon evidence, transparency, and the ability of investigators to evaluate information without interference.

#### **The Need for Transparency**

Transparency remains one of the strongest safeguards in transplantation. Public confidence is strengthened when donor sources, allocation practices, and transplant outcomes can be independently reviewed and verified.

#### **The Protection of Vulnerable Populations**

Perhaps the most important theme of the discussion was the protection of vulnerable individuals. Ethical medicine requires that every person be treated with dignity and that no individual be subjected to coercion or exploitation for the benefit of others.

### **Final Thoughts**

The conversation between Sean Spicer and Jan Jekielek extended beyond politics and beyond medicine. At its core, the discussion focused on a simple but powerful principle: the success of transplantation depends upon trust.

For transplant recipients, physicians, policymakers, and the public, that trust is built through ethical safeguards, informed consent, transparency, and accountability. Regardless of where one stands on the allegations discussed, the interview serves as a reminder that transplantation achieves its highest purpose only when it respects both human life and human dignity.

As the global transplant community continues to evolve, maintaining those principles will remain essential to preserving one of medicine's greatest achievements.

## **THE CHINA TRIBUNAL AND INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATIONS**

For more than two decades, allegations of forced organ harvesting in China have generated concern among physicians, human rights advocates, lawmakers, journalists, and transplant professionals around the world. These allegations have led to numerous investigations, reports, parliamentary hearings, and public discussions regarding the ethical sourcing of organs for transplantation. Among the most widely publicized efforts to examine these claims was the China Tribunal, an independent people's tribunal established in London to review available evidence and assess allegations concerning organ procurement practices in China.

The controversy has become one of the most significant ethical debates in modern transplantation because it raises fundamental questions about informed consent, human rights, transparency, and public trust in organ donation systems.

### **What Was Investigated?**

The China Tribunal was established in 2018 and chaired by Sir Geoffrey Nice KC, a British barrister who previously served as lead prosecutor in the trial of former Serbian President Slobodan Milošević before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

The tribunal was created to examine allegations that prisoners of conscience and other detained individuals in China may have been used as involuntary sources of organs for transplantation. Particular attention was given to allegations involving practitioners of Falun Gong, a spiritual discipline that has faced persecution in China since 1999. Testimony and reports also discussed concerns involving other detained populations, including Uyghurs and certain religious and ethnic minorities.

Over several public hearings, the tribunal heard testimony from former detainees, medical professionals, researchers, human rights investigators, journalists, and legal experts. Witnesses described detention experiences, medical examinations, transplant practices, and efforts to investigate China's transplant system.

In addition to witness testimony, the tribunal reviewed a wide range of documentary evidence, including hospital reports, transplant statistics, published medical literature, government statements, and independent investigative reports. Researchers presented analyses examining the growth of China's transplant industry and the apparent discrepancy between the number of officially reported donors and the volume of transplant procedures being performed.

### **Major Findings**

In June 2019, the China Tribunal issued its final judgment.

The tribunal concluded that forced organ harvesting had occurred in China and that prisoners of conscience were likely among the sources of organs used for transplantation. The panel stated that it was satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that such practices had taken place over a substantial period of time.

The tribunal further concluded that the scale of transplantation activity in China could not be fully explained by officially acknowledged donor sources alone. Its findings received significant international attention because of the extensive testimony reviewed and the public nature of the proceedings.

At the same time, Chinese authorities have consistently rejected these allegations. Chinese officials maintain that major reforms implemented beginning in 2015 ended the use of organs from executed prisoners and established a voluntary civilian donation system based on international standards. Chinese representatives have argued that their current transplant system operates ethically and complies with accepted medical practices. Because independent access to certain data and facilities remains limited, debate continues regarding the interpretation of available evidence and the degree to which outside investigators can independently verify official claims.

### **International Reactions**

The tribunal's findings generated reactions from governments, professional organizations, human rights groups, and medical ethicists around the world.

In the United States, members of Congress have held hearings and introduced legislation addressing concerns about forced organ harvesting and transplant tourism. Similar discussions have occurred in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and several European nations.

The European Parliament has previously adopted resolutions expressing concern regarding allegations of organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience. Human rights organizations have called for increased transparency, independent inspections, and greater international scrutiny of transplant practices.

Some countries have taken specific legislative action. Israel implemented reforms designed to discourage transplant tourism and prevent insurance reimbursement for transplants involving illegally obtained organs. Taiwan adopted reporting requirements intended to increase transparency regarding overseas transplant procedures. Other nations have strengthened laws related to organ trafficking and unethical transplantation practices. Professional medical organizations have generally emphasized the importance of informed consent, transparency, traceability of organs, and independent oversight. Many transplant experts argue that public confidence depends upon the ability to verify that organs originate from voluntary and ethical sources.

### **Ongoing Debate and Discussion**

Despite years of investigations and public reporting, discussion regarding forced organ harvesting remains ongoing.

Supporters of continued investigation argue that allegations involving possible human rights abuses require persistent scrutiny and independent verification. They point to witness testimony, statistical analyses, and investigative reports as reasons for continued concern.

Others emphasize the challenges of evaluating incomplete information and caution against drawing conclusions without unrestricted access to medical records, donor registries, and transplant facilities. Some observers argue that further transparency from all parties would help clarify unresolved questions.

Regardless of differing viewpoints, most experts agree on one essential principle: organ transplantation must be grounded in ethical standards that protect donors and recipients alike.



### **Timeline of Key Events**

#### **1999–2005: Early Allegations**

Reports emerge from former detainees, researchers, and advocacy organizations alleging persecution of Falun Gong practitioners and raising questions about organ procurement practices.

#### **2006–2017: Investigative Reports**

Independent researchers, journalists, physicians, and human rights organizations publish analyses examining transplant volumes, waiting times, donor sources, and transplant system growth.

#### **2018–2019: China Tribunal Hearings**

The China Tribunal conducts public hearings in London, reviews testimony and documentary evidence, and issues its final judgment in June 2019.

#### **2020–Present: Continued International Scrutiny**

Governments, medical organizations, and human rights groups continue discussions regarding transplant ethics, transparency, and international oversight. Legislative initiatives addressing transplant tourism and organ trafficking continue to emerge in several countries.



## **Why This Matters**

For transplant recipients, physicians, and donor families, the China Tribunal underscores a fundamental truth: successful transplantation depends upon trust. Every ethical transplant system is built on informed consent, transparency, accountability, and respect for human dignity.

Organ donation represents one of humanity's greatest acts of generosity. Donors and their families make extraordinary sacrifices to save the lives of others. Maintaining public confidence in that gift requires vigilance and adherence to ethical principles.

Whether one focuses on the findings of the China Tribunal, ongoing investigations, or the broader debate surrounding transplantation ethics, the central lesson remains the same. Transparency and accountability are not barriers to transplantation. They are the safeguards that protect donors, recipients, physicians, and the integrity of the transplant system itself.

As transplantation continues to evolve worldwide, preserving these ethical foundations will remain essential to maintaining public trust and ensuring that one of medicine's greatest achievements remains worthy of the confidence placed in it by society.



## **WHY THIS MATTERS TO LIVER TRANSPLANT PATIENTS**

For liver transplant patients, organ donation is far more than a medical procedure—it is a lifesaving gift. Every transplant recipient depends on a system built upon trust, ethics, and respect for human dignity. That is why discussions about transplant ethics matter to every patient and family touched by liver disease.

Ethical donation systems help build public trust. Donors and their families must have confidence that organs are obtained through voluntary, informed consent and that every person is treated with dignity and respect. Without that trust, fewer people may be willing to become donors, potentially reducing the availability of lifesaving organs.

Protecting donors is a fundamental responsibility of every transplant system. Ethical safeguards ensure that individuals are never coerced into donation and that human dignity remains central to every aspect of transplantation. Respect for donors honors the extraordinary gift they provide.

Recipients also benefit from strong ethical standards. Patients awaiting transplantation deserve confidence that the organ they receive was obtained through a fair, transparent, and ethical process. Trust in the transplant system strengthens confidence in the care they receive.

Liver transplant patients can support ethical organ donation by becoming informed about transplantation practices, discussing donation wishes with family members, and advocating for transparency and accountability in organ donation systems.

Education helps preserve public trust and supports the continued success of transplantation.

Ultimately, ethical organ donation protects donors, recipients, and society while ensuring that the gift of life remains grounded in compassion, respect, and human dignity.

**PHYSICIAN CORNER**

**Questions Every Healthcare Professional Should Consider**

Organ transplantation is one of medicine's greatest achievements, but its success depends on more than surgical skill and scientific innovation. It also depends on maintaining the highest ethical standards. As discussions surrounding transplant ethics continue worldwide, healthcare professionals should consider several important questions.

**First, what ethical safeguards protect donors?** Modern transplant systems rely on principles such as the Dead Donor Rule, informed consent, independent donor evaluation, and regulatory oversight. These safeguards help ensure that organ donation remains voluntary and respectful of human dignity.

**Second, how is consent verified?** Ethical transplantation requires clear documentation that donors—or their authorized representatives—have freely agreed to donation. Living donors undergo extensive medical and psychological evaluation to confirm that decisions are informed and free from coercion.

**Third, what role does transparency play?** Transparency is essential to public trust. Donation practices, donor sources, allocation systems, and transplant outcomes should be open to independent review. Without transparency, confidence in the transplant system can be undermined.

**Fourth, how should allegations of abuse be investigated?** Allegations involving unethical organ procurement should be examined objectively, thoroughly, and independently. Investigations must be guided by evidence, professional integrity, and respect for due process.

**Finally, what responsibilities do physicians have?** Physicians are entrusted with protecting patients and upholding ethical medical practice. They must remain informed about transplant ethics, advocate for donor and recipient protections, support transparency, and promote adherence to internationally recognized ethical standards.

By asking these questions, healthcare professionals help preserve public trust and ensure that transplantation continues to reflect the core values of medicine: compassion, respect, accountability, and the protection of human life.



## **HUMANITARIAN SECTION**

### **A CALL FOR AWARENESS**

Organ transplantation represents one of humanity's greatest achievements. Every successful transplant reflects the generosity of a donor, the dedication of healthcare professionals, and the hope of a recipient whose life has been transformed. Yet beyond the science and surgery lies a deeper responsibility: the obligation to ensure that every transplant is grounded in respect for human dignity and ethical principles.

At its core, the discussion surrounding forced organ harvesting is not simply about medicine. It is about people. It is about recognizing the inherent value of every human life and ensuring that no individual is treated as a means to an end. Human dignity is a fundamental principle recognized across cultures, religions, and legal systems. Every person possesses the right to bodily autonomy, informed consent, and protection from coercion. These rights do not disappear because an individual is imprisoned, marginalized, or politically vulnerable.

Medical ethics provide the framework that protects these values. For centuries, physicians have been guided by principles that place the welfare of patients above all other considerations. Concepts such as informed consent, nonmaleficence ("do no harm"), beneficence, and respect for persons form the ethical foundation of healthcare. Organ transplantation depends upon these principles. Without them, public trust in the transplant system would be impossible to maintain.

The challenges raised by allegations of forced organ harvesting also highlight the importance of international cooperation. Organ trafficking, human exploitation, and violations of medical ethics do not respect national borders. Governments, healthcare organizations, professional societies, and human rights groups all have a role to play in promoting transparency and accountability. International collaboration can help establish standards, encourage independent oversight, and support ethical practices throughout the world.

Protecting vulnerable populations must remain a priority. History has repeatedly demonstrated that individuals who lack political power, social influence, or legal protections are often at greatest risk of exploitation. Whether the concern involves prisoners, ethnic minorities, refugees, impoverished communities, or other marginalized groups, ethical societies have a responsibility to ensure that vulnerable individuals are protected from abuse.

For transplant recipients, these issues may seem distant from the daily realities of medical care and recovery. Yet they are directly connected to the values that make transplantation possible. Every recipient benefits from a system built on trust, transparency, and respect for human dignity. Maintaining those values protects donors, recipients, families, and healthcare professionals alike.

Awareness is the first step toward protecting those principles. Becoming informed, supporting ethical donation systems, encouraging transparency, and participating in respectful dialogue all contribute to a stronger and more trustworthy transplant community.

Ultimately, the goal is not simply to save lives through transplantation, but to do so in a manner that honors the dignity of every human being. The true success of transplantation is measured not only by the number of lives saved, but also by the ethical principles that guide the process. By remaining vigilant and informed, we help ensure that one of medicine's greatest achievements remains worthy of the trust society places in it.

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

As we conclude this special edition of Hepatic Haven, it is important to reflect on the central message that has emerged throughout these pages: organ transplantation is one of medicine's greatest achievements, but its success depends upon an unwavering commitment to ethical principles.

For transplant recipients like myself, organ donation is deeply personal. Every day I am reminded that my life was saved because a donor and a donor's family made an extraordinary and selfless decision. Their gift provided me with more time with my family, friends, and community. It is a gift for which I will remain forever grateful. The purpose of this issue has not been to create fear or undermine confidence in transplantation. Rather, it has been to encourage awareness and thoughtful discussion about the ethical foundations that make transplantation possible. Trust, transparency, informed consent, accountability, and respect for human dignity are not abstract concepts. They are the safeguards that protect donors, recipients, and society as a whole.

Throughout this edition, we have explored allegations of forced organ harvesting, international investigations, the work of journalists and researchers, and the importance of ethical oversight. Regardless of where one stands on specific findings or ongoing debates, there should be broad agreement that every organ donation system must be transparent, accountable, and centered on respect for human life. As healthcare professionals, patients, caregivers, and citizens, we all share a responsibility to support ethical organ donation and to advocate for the highest standards of medical practice. Education and awareness are powerful tools for preserving public trust and protecting vulnerable individuals.

The miracle of transplantation represents the very best of humanity. Let us honor that gift by ensuring that every transplant is guided by compassion, integrity, and respect for human dignity.

Only then can the gift of life remain worthy of the trust placed in it by generations to come.