Congress Closer to Lifting HIV-Positive Organ Donor Ban

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A U.S. House of Representatives committee has unanimously approved a bill that would remove the ban on HIV-positive organ donors, ScienceInsider reports. On July 27, the Energy and Commerce Committee made this crucial step in the process of ending the quarter-century federal ban; a similar bill won unanimous support from the Senate in June. The HIV Organ Policy Equity Act would open the doors for donations between HIV-positive people as well as for further research into the outcomes of such surgeries.

Out of the more than 118,000 Americans on the waiting list of the Organ Transplant and Procurement Network, about 1,000 are living with HIV. Many of them are waiting for kidneys as a result of renal failure. Meanwhile, a 2011 study out of Johns Hopkins estimated that there are about 500 HIV-positive potential organ donors each year. Among them, they could provide about 1,000 organs to other people living with the virus.

Research has shown the promise of organ donations between people with HIV. In 2010, a South African team successfully transplanted kidneys from HIV-positive donors into four people living with the virus. Another study that year, published in The New England Journal of Medicine, tracked 150 recipients of HIV-positive kidney transplants over a three-year follow-up period and boasted good success rates. However, the study did identify a concern of how to balance HIV antiretrovirals with the immunosuppressant drugs necessary to prevent rejection of transplanted organs.

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