

ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION FROM AGES AND INFORMING STRATEGIES POINT OF VIEW

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Rezumat: Problematika transplantului de organe este una care interesează deopotrivă știința medicală dar și pe cea socială. Premisele de la care pornim sunt acelea că există un deficit de informare la nivelul populației (mai ales pe anumite categorii de vârstă) în ceea ce privește transplantul și că multe din atitudinile și reprezentările ieșenilor față de această temă sunt marcate de practici și reprezentări tradiționale ale corpului, bolii sau ale morții. Cercetarea beneficiază de o dublă perspectivă metodologică: una calitativă (analiza articolelor referitoare la transplant din presa românească pe parcursul unui an) și cea de-a doua cantitativă (chestionarea unui eșantion de 1120 persoane din Iași și analiza statistică a răspunsurilor în funcție de vârsta respondenților). Rezultatele cercetării cantitative și a celui calitative se pot sintetiza astfel: limbajul jurnalistic (re)produce variante moderne ale unor imagini și reprezentări mitico-simbolice prin folosirea unui dublu limbaj (unul specializat și unul accesibil publicului larg); atitudinile și reprezentările populației ieșene față de transplant pot fi caracterizate ca fiind reținute și moderate, ele exprimând, în fapt o formă de necunoaștere și o informare insuficientă. În concluzie, putem spune că demersul nostru a evidențiat lacune în informarea populației, indiferent de vârstă, în ceea ce privește tema transplantului. Construcția articolelor cât și răspunsurile celor chestionați, situându-se mai curând în zona unei gândiri mitico-simbolice. Toate aceste rezultate și interpretări au constituit premisele unei pledoarii în favoarea unei educații și informări corecte pentru a genera alegeri și atitudini raționale, pe deplin conștiente.

Cuvinte-cheie: transplant, reprezentări sociale, percepții intergeneraționale, politici de sănătate.

Abstract: The issue of transplant of organs is one that interests both the medical science, as well as the social one. The premises from which we begin are those that there is a deficit of information at the level of population (especially for certain age categories) in what regards the transplant and that many of the attitudes and representations of the inhabitants of Iasi regarding this subject are marked by traditional

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practices and representations of body, illness and death. The research benefits of a double methodological perspective: a qualitative one (the analysis of articles regarding the transplant from the Romanian press during one year) and the second one, the quantitative one (questioning a sample of 1120 persons from Iasi and the statistic analysis of answers according to the age of respondents). The results of the quantitative research and of the qualitative one can be thus synthesized: the journalistic language (re)produces, in our opinion, modern versions of some mythical-symbolical images and representations by using a double language (a specialized one and one accessible for the public); the attitudes and representations of the population from Iasi regarding the transplant can be characterized as being reserved and moderate, expressing, in fact, a form of ignorance and an insufficient information. In conclusion, we can say that our demarche has highlighted gaps in the information of population, no matter the age, in what regards the theme of transplant. The construction of articles, as well as the answers of the questioned persons, is rather in the area of a mythical-symbolical thinking. All these results and interpretations have built the premises of a pleading in favor of a correct education and information in order to generate rational, completely aware, choices and attitudes.

Keywords: transplant, social representations, intergenerational representations, politics of health.

Résumé: La transplantation d'organes est un problème qui intéresse à la fois la science médicale et la science sociale. Les prémisses dont on part sont qu'il ya un déficit d'information de la population (en particulier dans certains groupes d'âge) sur la question de transplantation et que bon nombre des attitudes et des représentations de ce thème à Iasi est marqué par les pratiques traditionnelles et les représentations du corps, de la maladie ou de la mort. La méthodologie de recherche réjouit d'une double perspective méthodologique: une analyse qualitative (analyse des articles liés à la transplantation dans la presse roumaine) et la seconde quantitative (investigation d'un échantillon de 1120 personnes à Iasi et l'analyse statistique des réponses selon l'âge des répondants).

Les résultats de la recherche quantitative et qualitative peuvent être résumés comme il suit: le langage journalistique (re)produit, à notre avis, les versions modernes de certaines images et représentations mythico-symboliques en utilisant un double langage (l'un spécialisé et l'autre accessible au public en général). Les attitudes et les représentations de la population de Iasi peuvent être caractérisées comme étant réservées et modérées. En fait, elles peuvent exprimer, une forme d'ignorance et de manque d'informations.

En conclusion, nous pouvons dire que notre approche a révélé des lacunes dans l'information du public, indépendamment de l'âge, en ce qui concerne la transplantation. La rédaction des articles et les réponses des répondants se situent plutôt dans une zone marquée d'une pensée mythico-symbolique.

Tous ces résultats et les interprétations ont été les lieux d'un plaidoyer en faveur de l'éducation et l'information correcte pour générer des choix rationnels et des attitudes, pleinement conscient.

Mots-clés: transplantation, les représentations sociales, politiques de santé, perceptions intergénérationnelles.

A. Transplant of organs. A medical and social issue

At the level of common sense, the transplant of organs seems to be a strictly medical problem. In the first instance, the theme of transplant announces a top level, of excellence, where the medical science and practice has reached (Steinberg, 2003: 17-18.). A series of quantitative approaches of the type of accounting the number of transplants made in one year, of the type of transplants, of the medical successes and of the highlight of other indicators come to support this fact. “What is lost in these approaches is the imponderable dimension of the fact that, by means of transplant, the body of the deceased person is subjected to some invasive medical practices, and parts of this body are introduced, sometimes instead, other times next to the organs from the receiver’s body” (Frunza, 2010: 33.). This fact is also noticeable when we analyze the production of Romanian press in terms of transplant. Such a state of fact can be read as an expression of some already existing images, perceptions and representations. As a matter of fact, the press often reproduces stereotypes and representations already ran in the social life.

A study made on six journals of great circulation from the Romanian press, in a postdoctoral research project in 2011, highlights this. The analysis of articles that have as main subject the theme of transplant shows that in their contents a big enough share is held by the information with medical aspect. Thus, from a total of 143 press articles, there were identified about 81 references of promotion of transplant in mass-media and 38 references regard the doctors as main actors in this field. Formulations such as: “A kidney transplant for the first time”, “Surgeons from Fundeni have made an operation for the first time”, “The first transplant of organs”, “doses of immunosuppressive”, “stem cells”, “surgical interventions” announce not only the novelty but, implicitly, also the specific, medical character of the information. The terms of specialty used in the studied articles somehow direct the reader’s attention to the medical dimension of the phenomenon, to the fact that the news deals with an exclusivist domain, that of transplant.

These references are however completed by others that widen the area of understanding the transplant, thus placing it in the area of psycho-social. The same articles include 38 references to doctors, 46 references regarding the health system and 135 references regarding the receiver or donor’s personal history. Practically, at the level of Romanian publications, we notice that the specialty language is doubled by a regular one, narrative and descriptive, that tries to position the transplant of organs also in the psychosocial area.

Beyond the notable medical performances in the field of transplant are the human dramas, but also the social constrains. Thus, the reader can discover that the

transplant of organs is conditioned not only by the performances of doctors and of current medical science, but also by a series of aspects that are related to the politics and organization of the health system, to the material, financial resources, but also to aspects of mental nature that are reflected at the level of perceptions and representations.

For instance, we learn that the transplant does not imply just equipment of performance, prepared doctors, analysis of compatibility and medication with immunosuppressive, but also special costs, issues regarding the organization, the ethics, the insurance of a legislative frame (Ioan & Astărăstoae, 2007) that allows a growth of the number of drawn organs, of distribution of the financial and human resources etc.

The fact that the transplant of organs is no longer just a medical issue is proven also by statistics, as well as by the studies made in the field that emphasizes the importance of some ethical (Veatch, 2000), legislative and financial frames, but also cultural (Sheper-Hughes, 2007: 507-511; Hippen.& Taylor, 2007: 1695-1697). ones favorable for supporting the transplant of organs and, by this mean, the saving of as many lives as possible. The analyzed journalistic language assumes a double perspective in which the elements of medical specialty are combined with impressive life stories and experiences. This fact also allows an anthropologic interpretation of the journalistic text made on the theme of transplant.

The anthropologic explanations that save the journalistic discourse in the area of mythology and symbolism (Huynem, 1995:142.) seem to be verified this time as well. Without doubt, some journalistic texts are built “starting from and going beyond the referential dimension, a new area of significations, deeply anchored in the symbolic codes and vocabulary of the aimed collectivities” (Coman, 2003: 87). The language specific for the doctors’ world has a special symbolic load for non-specialists. It either announces the presence of the doctor as an all-knowing mythological character or as a rescuer hero, or it places the medical act and the death in the area of unusual events, exceptional ones (Aries, 1996: 24) events that perfectly overlap the gestures and facts present in the entire mythological picture.

The same way, the common language that presents personal dramas and rarely encountered life situations has a symbolic load that has as ending the creation of an atmosphere of community between the common reader and the dramas or events described in the journalistic text. The result of our research can be read in a formal and narrative plan. In the first case, it is noticed a growth of the social cohesion by means of participating to the journalistic stories and narrations, fact that can exceed the informative and explanatory content of articles. In the second case, we witness a “mythical permanent renewal” (Huynem, 1995: 142)

As the analysis undertaken by us shows, the narrative content repeatedly expresses a fundamental life experience that swings between living and dying.

The statistic analysis, the one of content, as well as the anthropological perspective, proves that in the Romanian press the theme of transplant is presented as a dramatic, new or exceptional fact. The content and the information useful for the reader seem to be dominated by the atmosphere created around the phenomenon. Although the texts contain many elements of medical nature, the information of social-human nature dominate from the impact's point of view. For this reason, we are convinced that the journalistic message folds rather well on the structure and expectations of the reading public.

B. Intergenerational perceptions and representations of the transplant of organs. Study in municipality Iasi

Our demarche continues from a short analysis and interpretation of the journalistic discourse from our press till the analysis of population's perceptions and representations, of the potential readers. The classical scheme that is under the sign of the relation between transmitter and receiver is thus slightly modified, the second category being in our case represented by the population of Iasi as potential receiver of some journalistic messages of the type of those announced above.

The research involved the application of 1127 questionnaires in municipality Iasi. The sampling was one of probabilistic, of three stages (stage I – the random selection of 46 points of sampling, stage II – the random selection of houses, stage III – the random selection of respondents) and stratified type. The obtained results show that at the level of Iasi's population, there are representations and perceptions rather well defined regarding the issue of donation and transplant of organs. Our analysis wants to surprise to what extent differs the level of perception and representation from one age category to another, from one generation to another. This, all the more it is known the fact that the theme of transplant of organs from a deceased person brings to the investigated persons' attention the issue of disease (Hyden, 1997: 48-69.), of death and of body (Budgeon, 2003: 35-55; Aho & Aho, 2009: 1). The psychological perspectives on human development (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2010) show that, in parallel with the biological changes that occur as a result of age transition, an entire series of changes also occurs at the level of perceptions, experiences, feelings and, implicitly, at the level of representations. The theme studied by us can best highlight this fact. Thus, Kubler-Ross (Kubler-Ross, 1969), in the paper *On Death and Dying*, identifies five stages of the deepest fears and reactions of the patients in terminal stage, namely: negation and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. In what our research is concerned, we would have expected for the answers to be visibly different for elderly persons, since they feel more the pressure of body, the burden of years, and the theme of death is one they meditate about more often.

The analyses have highlighted something of novelty. In the space of Iasi, the median age, according to which one can establish age groups and the analysis of the given answers, is one rather young: 39 years old. Moreover, although the differences between the two age groups are significant, the scores do not place them in opposite poles. We can, therefore, distinguish a general picture where the nature of answers cannot be reproduced through strongly contrasting colors.

The numbers show that there are significant correlations between the respondents' age and their answers. The statistic comparisons show that those with the age of over 39 have higher averages than those with ages under this limit.

Thus, those with ages of over 39 years old believe to a very large extent that it is important to have all the organs in the moment of death (a coefficient of 3,175) in comparison with 2,777, which represents the coefficient of those that have ages under 39 years old. In the same registrar are presented other answers as well. For the respondents of over 39 years old, the drawing of organs from deceased persons is rather a lack of respect for the deceased one and the family, while the respondents from the category of those under 39 years old rather have a negative attitude towards this kind of statements. The first age category of subjects believe that we are a divine creation whose corporal integrity must be kept after death as well, while the second category of subjects offers answers that are rather in the negative zone. Moreover, the same tendency is noticed also when the respondents are in the situation of expressing their opinion regarding the way in which the transplant influences the receiver's personality. In this situation, the score of the obtained coefficients is of 3,115 to 2,925. Those stated by our respondents eventually become some sort of support to express their position and that of the families from which they come in the case they would agree with the donation of an organ of a deceased member of family. From here, one can also visualize the difficulty to assume a decision for a member of family.

Synthetically, the situation of coefficients regarding the answers of the two age categories is thus presented:

	under 39 years	over 39 years
It is very important to have all the organs in the moment of death	2,777	3,175
God created us completely and we must remain like this	2, 589	3,073
The transplant of organs from deceased donors can change the personality of the receiver of organ	2,952	3,115
In case I would agree with the donation of organs of a dying member of family, the family would always remain with remorse, with a heavy conscience	2,812	3,015

The transplant of organs from deceased donors represents a mutilation of their body	2,353	2,591
The transplant of organs from deceased donors violates the will of God	2,512	2,889

How do we explain these scores and their distributions on the age categories that have as landmark such a young age? To what do we owe these retained and moderate perceptions and representations regarding the theme of donation and transplant of organs?

- First of all, the answers, according to the obtained scores, gravitate, according to age, around “rather agreeing” the suggested statements. They can announce not just a certain degree of medical information (rather low in our case), but also a dominant attitude of representations and images that, surprisingly, seem to have not necessarily a religious justification of Christian type. We say this because our respondents are not convinced that the transplant of organs from deceased donors does not necessarily represent God’s will. As gentle are also the representations regarding the image of a mutilated body as consequence of the drawing of an organ. The score of 2,353 to 2,591 in favor of those of the age of over 39 years old is an example in this respect. It is possible that the explanations of anthropologic nature to be the most suitable in this context. With such results, we cannot invoke, under no circumstances, theories and perspectives generated by the psychology of ages and the human development that identifies for each age category a set of bio-psycho-social peculiarities. It is possible that the population of Iasi keeps a higher connection with the traditional thinking of mythical-symbolical type. In this situation, we take into account the successful survival in Romania and in the region of Moldavia of a funeral ritual (Marian, 1995; ***, 2000), extremely elaborate and expensive. In its frame the entire family and collectivity, regardless of age, is involved (Marian, 1995). But precisely this acquaintance with death and its rituals can generate a certain type of polarization of the answers. To these, one may add also the lack of a correct and coherent information. As we have showed, the Romanian press is full of variations on the theme of transplant that end up genuine narrations whose echo is not necessarily an informative one. They express in fact the level of attitudes and representations about body, death, life etc. Without doubt, the practice at the scale of community of the funeral practices, and not only, maintain alive also a certain mythology and symbolism of body and death described and analyzed in the works of some illustrious Romanian ethnologist.

- At the same time, such answers towards a series of statements regarding the transplant of organs seem to express ambiguous attitudes, rather reserved towards the act of donation and the practice of transplant. According to our opinion, many of the respondents’ options cannot be justified not even by

themselves. For this reason, the answers are even more valuable since they express concrete choices dictated by the latent, irresponsible images and representations.

- The absence of radical answers is also a sign that, according to the context and the symbolic registrar in which they function (either it is about compassion, pity, atmosphere of solidarity, etc.) the respondents can offer positive answers and could agree with the donation of an organ. The statement of doctor Irinel Popescu, in different mass-media contexts, according to which “Romanians are united in pain”, can be an argument in this respect and is based on a rich practice in the field of transplant of organs.

C. Instead of conclusions, a pleading for medical education and information

The analysis presented above shows that, at least at the level of Iasi’s population, when it comes to the donation of organs and to transplant, the personal options and choices are generated by a prevalent symbolical thinking. This fact is noticeable also in the case of advertising message, which can equally be an expression and a form of supplying of the same symbolical thinking. The fact in itself is neither good, nor bad. Such a perspective must however be completed by a medical education and information and not only so that it generates rational, completely aware choices.

The latter ones do not cancel at all the symbolical perspective on the world but, we believe, it helps it to express itself in a constructive, open and beneficial manner for man and community.

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