

*Interview***Uttarakhand - An Emerging State's Experience with Deceased Organ Donation****Ankur Mittal**

AIIMS, Rishikesh, India

**Dr. Ankur Mittal**Additional Professor & Head
Department of Urology
AIIMS, Rishikesh

AIIMS Rishikesh recently had its first deceased organ donation. This is a remarkable achievement. Can you tell us more about it?

Yes, AIIMS Rishikesh reached a major milestone with its first deceased organ donation on August 1, 2024. The donor was a 25-year-old young man, a pilgrim from Haryana who had been involved in a tragic road accident while bringing Ganga water from Haridwar. After being declared brainstem dead at AIIMS Rishikesh, his family made a brave and

compassionate decision to donate his organs, offering a second chance at life to many others. His one kidney and pancreas were sent to PGIMER Chandigarh, while the other kidney and liver were shared with ILBS, Delhi. Both corneas were used at the AIIMS Rishikesh eye bank.

AIIMS Rishikesh is the first government hospital in Uttarakhand to initiate living renal transplants, which is a significant achievement. Can you tell us about this journey?

AIIMS Rishikesh has become the first government hospital in Uttarakhand to successfully initiate living renal transplants, marking a major advancement in healthcare for the region. So far, the institute has completed 8 live-related renal transplants, under the guidance of a team from AIIMS Delhi. This milestone has brought new hope to patients with end-stage renal disease in the region and lays the groundwork for further expansion of transplant services at AIIMS Rishikesh.

Are there other transplant centers in Uttarakhand?

Yes, besides AIIMS Rishikesh, there are three other operational transplant centres in Uttarakhand, located in Dehradun: Max Hospital, Himalayan Institute of Medical Sciences (HIMS), and Shri Guru Ram Rai Institute of Medical & Health Sciences (SGRRIMHS). While these centres play a vital role in expanding access to transplantation services in the region, providing patients with more opportunities for life-saving treatments like kidney transplants, AIIMS Rishikesh is the only public hospital in this region that is performing transplants.

What efforts are underway to promote organ donation in the region?

Several initiatives are being taken to promote organ donation in the region. AIIMS Rishikesh has partnered with the NGO, MOHAN Foundation to drive campaigns both online and offline, focussing on deceased organ donation. As part of this partnership, regular organ donation awareness sessions are conducted to educate people, dispel myths, and encourage donor registration. Public outreach efforts, including social media, local TV, radio, and newspapers, highlight real-life success stories, while community and religious leaders are engaged to promote cultural acceptance of organ donation. The institute's medical staff are being trained to identify and manage potential donors, ensuring a smooth donation and transplant process.

What do you see as the main challenges for organ donation and transplantation in Uttarakhand?

There are several key challenges for organ donation and transplantation in Uttarakhand. Public awareness remains limited despite ongoing efforts, with myths, religious beliefs, and misconceptions discouraging many from registering as donors.

The healthcare infrastructure, while improving, is still developing, especially in remote areas, affecting organ retrieval, preservation, and transplantation capabilities. Coordinating organ retrieval and timely allocation is also a logistical challenge due to the region's difficult terrain, often resulting in delays or missed opportunities.

Additionally, there is a shortage of trained transplant coordinators and specialized healthcare professionals to manage donor identification and organ retrieval.

And opportunities?

I feel that expanding public awareness campaigns, including the involvement of influential individuals, religious leaders, and government initiatives, can shift perceptions and encourage more people to register as organ donors.

Strengthening and increasing the number of transplant centers in the region would reduce reliance on out-of-state facilities and better serve the local population. Training healthcare professionals, such as surgeons, coordinators, and nurses, is essential for improving the efficiency of the donation and transplantation process.

Government support through favourable policies and funding would enhance infrastructure, awareness efforts, and organ donation drives. Additionally, the region offers potential for research on organ transplantation and donation trends, which could lead to innovative solutions tailored to the unique demographic and geographical challenges of Uttarakhand.

Any other thoughts before we close?

The seamless coordination by the multi disciplinary team at AIIMS Rishikesh, under the leadership of our Executive director and CEO Prof Meenu Singh, supported by the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organization (NOTTO) and ROTTO, ensured the donation process was carried out efficiently and with deep respect for both the donor and his family.

The donor's legacy lives on through the lives he saved, and this first donation serves as a powerful example for the region, further advancing AIIMS Rishikesh's mission to promote organ donation in Uttarakhand and beyond.

Interviewed by Ms. Pallavi Kumar,
Executive Director, MOHAN Foundation

Corresponding Author: Dr. Sunil Shroff,
MOHAN Foundation, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Email: shroff@mohanfoundation.org

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