

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Heart transplantation following euthanasia: Prior experience from Belgium



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We read with great interest the recent Case Anecdote by Abdullah and colleagues describing heart transplantation following medical assistance in dying (MAiD).¹ This report represents an ethically complex and clinically significant contribution to the ongoing expansion of the donation after circulatory death donor pool, a strategy known to improve access to transplantation while maintaining comparable post-transplant outcomes to donation after brain death.²

Nevertheless, we would like to respectfully point out that this is not the first reported case of successful heart transplantation following euthanasia or MAiD. Our group previously reported two peer-reviewed cases of successful heart transplantation after euthanasia performed in Belgium, where euthanasia has been legally regulated since 2002.^{3,4}

The first report, published in the *American Journal of Transplantation* in 2022, described the world's first heart transplantation following euthanasia, using distant procurement with normothermic regional perfusion followed by cold storage.³ The second publication, in the *Annals of Cardiothoracic Surgery* in 2024, further detailed the clinical protocol and ethical framework surrounding donation after euthanasia.⁴ Both publications emphasized feasibility and ethical rigor, ensuring a strict separation between the euthanasia procedure and organ retrieval, in compliance with national legal and ethical standards.

While the Canadian MAiD system differs in terminology and procedure, its operational framework for healthcare teams has been well described.⁵ Conceptually, however, MAiD and euthanasia share the same principle of voluntary assisted dying, followed by controlled donation after circulatory death organ donation. The case reported by

Abdullah et al.¹ used direct procurement and ex-situ perfusion with the TransMedics Organ Care System—an alternative preservation method rather than a conceptual first. Accurate historical contextualization is therefore essential to acknowledge prior contributions and to build a cumulative and transparent understanding of this emerging field.

We commend the authors for their contribution and for promoting open scientific dialogue on this sensitive but life-saving topic. International collaboration will be key to harmonizing protocols, data collection, and ethical oversight for organ donation after euthanasia or MAiD.

Conflicts of Interest statement

None declared.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (GPT-4o, 2025; OpenAI, San Francisco, CA) for language assistance to optimize the clarity and flow of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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