



U. S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Health Resources and Services Administration  
Health Systems Bureau  
Division of Transplantation



# GRANT *news*

March 2023 | A periodic e-bulletin to share results of organ donation and transplantation projects funded by the Division of Transplantation.

## Building trust: Connecting with Muslim Americans about organ donation

**Bridging the educational gap about organ donation in underrepresented donor communities is critical to saving lives.**

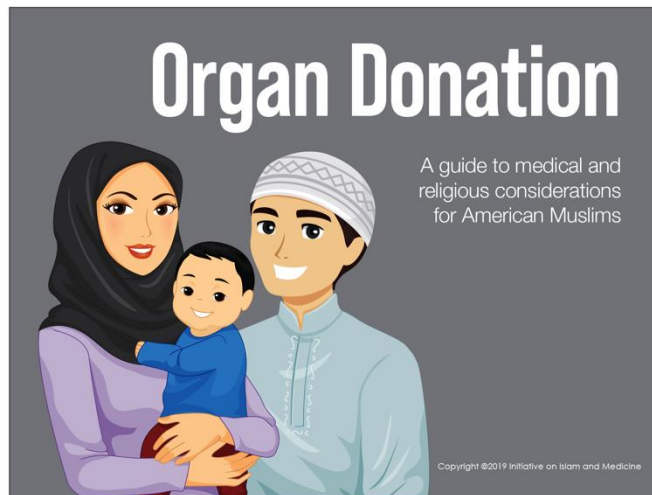


Image from “Organ Donation Decisional Guide for Muslim Americans.” These images are reprinted with permission from the Initiative on Islam and Medicine.

According to scholars who have researched healthcare disparities related to Islam, studies consistently show Muslim Americans are less likely to support organ donation than other religious groups, citing religious concerns as the primary reason.<sup>1</sup> A study of Arab Americans in Southeast Michigan found that Muslims were 1.5 times less likely to support organ donation than Christians.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, multiple perspectives exist in Islamic scholarship about the moral permissibility of organ donation, ranging from “never warranted” to “permissible because it saves lives.”

Based on research funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Division of Transplantation, Dr. Aasim Padela and Dr. Michael Quinn say these

<sup>1</sup> Mustafa Ahmed, Paul Kubilis, and Aasim Padela. “American Muslim Physician Attitudes Toward Organ Donation.” *Journal of Religion and Health* (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0683-2>

<sup>2</sup> Aasim Padela et al. “Factors Associated with Positive Attitudes toward Organ Donation in Arab Americans.” *Clinical Transplantation* (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1399-0012.2010.01382.x>

competing authoritative perspectives, coupled with a lack of organ donation education, can cause ambivalence toward organ donation in the broader Muslim American population. However, their research also shows this ambivalence can be overcome with education tailored to Islamic concerns.

## The Importance of Transparency

### Follow Sharif's Story

Meet Sharif. He is a very healthy 30-year-old Muslim man living in the United States.

Recently, Sharif's sister, Suhalia, found out she needs a kidney transplant. She went on dialysis and is waiting for Sharif to decide if living donation is right for him from medical and religious standpoints.

Follow along with Sharif throughout this booklet to see what information he gathers before making a choice about becoming a living donor.

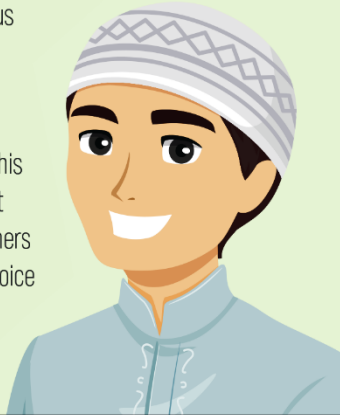


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Research by Dr. Padela and Dr. Quinn shows that when Muslim Americans are presented with the risks and rewards of organ donation, as well as the range of existing Islamic perspectives, they feel more favorable towards organ donation.

"Our research shows that people resolved their ambivalence and confusion about organ donation when they were given the full range of available information," says Dr. Quinn.

Dr. Quinn recommends that organ donation advocates avoid seeming demanding. "People often aren't ready to receive information when that information is presented from a one-sided perspective, and they resist," says Dr. Quinn. Instead, he encourages a two-sided approach to organ donation that is transparent about benefits and risks, as well as informative about the donation process.

Dr. Padela also cites transparency as key to engaging successfully with communities, including Muslim Americans, that are distrustful of healthcare authorities. He

recommends avoiding vague language like "some religions support organ donation" with no elaboration. Dr. Padela says religious communities recognize when strategic ambiguity is employed to sidestep their concerns.

"We want to respect people's personal choices regarding whether and which organs to donate," says Dr. Padela. "If you aren't transparent about conflicting religious opinions, you lose trust."

### Ways to Foster Trust

To help build trust, Dr. Padela and Dr. Quinn recommend using open-ended questions, reflective listening, and a non-demanding approach that lets people safely express their concerns and questions without being judged.

Dr. Quinn also notes that it's important to think strategically about where conversations about organ donation occur. "We found some Muslim Americans were reluctant to accept information from the DMV because it was an uncomfortable environment, and they did not trust the motivations behind the request to sign up as a donor."<sup>3</sup>

## Medical Considerations

As Sharif tries to decide whether becoming a living donor is right for him, he asks his doctor for medical guidance.

## Religious Considerations

As Sharif tries to decide whether living donation is right for him, he asks his Imam for religious guidance.

Images from "Organ Donation Decisional Guide for Muslim Americans." These images are reprinted with permission from the Initiative on Islam and Medicine.

Conversely, when the topic was broached in mosques and with the involvement of trusted religious and cultural leaders, the Muslim Americans in Dr. Quinn and Dr. Padela's study were very open to considering organ donation.

"The Muslim American community is too often seen as resistant, isolated, and unpersuadable, but we found them to be open to discussing these issues, in large part because of our method," says Dr. Quinn.

In short, how you approach the topic of organ donation is crucial to building a positive relationship that can lead to increased donor registration rates.

### Tailor, Don't Pander

For advocates wondering how to tailor conversations to religious communities without pandering, Dr. Padela recommends becoming familiar with the various religious viewpoints, avoiding religious language, and providing balanced information.

He also cautions against trusting theoretical assumptions. "We shouldn't rely on myths about what these communities think. Go to the people themselves and see how they're talking about these issues with one another."

Dr. Padela's most important piece of advice for engaging with Muslim Americans and other under-represented donor communities? "Be humble. Don't be

Sharif will take all the information from his doctors and religious leaders, talk with his family, and make the choice about becoming a living donor that **feels right to him.**



Image from "Organ Donation Decisional Guide for Muslim Americans." These images are reprinted with permission from the Initiative on Islam and Medicine.

<sup>3</sup> Megan Craig, Michael Quinn, Milda R. Saunders, Aasim I. Padela. "Muslim Americans' Views on Organ Donation Decisions in the Department of Motor Vehicles Setting." *Progress in Transplantation* (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1177/152692248211046003>

afraid to say, 'I don't know how this meshes with your belief system, but I can connect you to resources.'"

Learn more about Dr. Padela and Dr. Quinn's research and find access to resources about Muslim Americans and organ donation at this link:

<https://www.medicineandislam.org/american-muslims-about-living-donation/>



## Strategies that work:

- **Be humble.** Don't present yourself as an expert where you aren't. Instead, connect people to other resources, as needed.
- **Be transparent.** Build trust by providing all the available information people need to make an informed decision.
- **Work with community leaders.** Some communities are more receptive to meeting with organ donation advocates when a trusted community leader endorses the conversation.

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