

# Increasing Global Access to Organ Transplants *in the United Arab Emirates*



For decades, the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) has worked with governments across the globe to expand access to organ donation and transplant care through education, consultation and sharing best practices. UNOS has engaged with Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Turkey, Canada, France, Germany, Bulgaria, India, Italy, Qatar, Singapore, Australia, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands, and more. Several countries now have donation and transplant systems based on the American model, including Japan and South Korea. UNOS' work around the globe adheres to the WHO Guiding Principles on Human Cell, Tissue and Organ Transplantation.

## **Emirate of Dubai Collaboration**

In 2023, the Dubai Health Authority (DHA) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) sought UNOS' expertise to advise on developing a safe, effective, and regulated organ donation and transplant system that could serve the region. In support of UNOS' goal to help save more lives, UNOS bid on four contracts with the DHA to develop health facility requirements and standards of transplant care. UNOS won the contracts and successfully completed the project in May 2024.

This work will help improve the safety and impact of the Emirates' developing system. UNOS partnered with the Emirate of Dubai to develop clinical standards and a monitoring and compliance framework for their organ donation and transplant system that will provide greater and safer access to transplant for residents of the UAE and patients across the Middle East. In the UAE, organs will be distributed by need to all residents regardless of gender, nationality, or faith. This work reflects American values of equitable patient access and healthcare excellence, while also increasing American leadership in the global healthcare space and strengthening American ties with the UAE.

## **American Organizations' Leadership**

UNOS collaborated with leading transplant surgeons, professors, and organ procurement professionals from across the United States to bring the full spectrum of expertise in organ donation, procurement, and transplantation to the DHA.

To implement American-based standards for data-driven clinical care, the project included:

- Performing a gap analysis for the DHA through international benchmarking, global policy analysis, and stakeholder interviews.
- Developing audit checklists and standards of care for transplant hospitals.
- Hosting workshops in Dubai to educate key clinical and governmental stakeholders on the new standards of care.
- Developing clinical care requirements specific to the UAE's needs.

Achieving patient equity and access to transplant are key American health care values. To foster understanding and adoption of equity, the project included:

- Visiting UAE hospitals and engaging with their transplant professionals to foster a strong understanding of existing practices, structures, cultural circumstances, and issues limiting transplant care in the UAE. This helped the team identify opportunities to increase equity and access, which informed the team's approach and project deliverables.
- Presenting on the U.S. system and approach to transplant ethics during the UAE's global Donation and Transplantation Congress.

## **Organ Procurement and Transplantation in the UAE**

In the UAE, more than 4,000 people are in need of a lifesaving organ transplant. Increasing need for transplant in the UAE has required the Emirate to expand their donation and transplant practices beyond their current living donation-reliant model. The first living donor kidney transplant was performed in the UAE in 1985, the first heart transplant and deceased donor kidney transplant in 2017, and the first lung and liver transplants in 2018. They have expanded from 11 total deceased donor transplants in 2017 to nearly 700 deceased donor transplants in 2023. Two transplant hospitals perform most transplants in the UAE, with only one performing multi-organ transplant. Transplant leadership and care professionals in the UAE are trained all around the world.

The UAE's developing organ donation and transplant system is modeled on the principals of the American system. In addition to establishing a sophisticated donation and transplant system for its residents, the UAE also aspires to become a regional center for transplant for the entire Middle Eastern and North African regions.

While many nations in the Gulf Countries have some access to transplant, they mostly lack comprehensive donation and transplantation systems like the United States'. Historically, some Gulf countries have funded their citizens to travel abroad to receive transplants. Increasing access to transplant in this region is critical to ensure every patient, regardless of their nationality, can receive the gift of life.

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