

Enemies or allies? The organ transplant medical community, the federal government, and the public in the United States, 1967-2000.

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Abstract

The transplant medical community in the United States has frequently been divided over the appropriate role of the federal government and of the

public in matters related to organ transplantation. Using public statements in government hearings, newspapers, and press releases, this article traces the thinking of the transplant medical community in particular during three especially politicized periods: the heart transplant and brain death controversies in the late 1960s, consideration of the National Organ Transplant Act and other legislation during the mid-1980s, and the controversy over organ allocation regulations issued by the Department of Health and Human Services in the late 1990s. Even while sometimes denouncing “politicization,” over time surgeons, physicians, representatives of the United Network for Organ Sharing, and other leaders in the field became increasingly politically active and more accustomed to the notion that because of the unique nature of organ transplantation, both the public and the federal government have a legitimate and potentially beneficial oversight role.

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