ΕΡΕΥΝΗΤΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ – ORIGINAL PAPER

ΝΟΣΗΛΕΥΤΙΚΗ 2023, 62(4): 115-122 • **HELLENIC JOURNAL OF NURSING** 2023, 62(4): 115-122

The impact of an information brochure on the willingness to donate corneas

Ο αντίκτυπος ενός ενημερωτικού φυλλαδίου στην προθυμία δωρεάς κερατοειδούς

Abstract at the end of the article

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Υποβλήθηκε:25/07/2023
Επανυποβλήθηκε:18/09/2023
Εγκρίθηκε:10/10/2023

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Introduction: When the transparency of the cornea is compromised and all conservative, surgical, or alternative medical interventions prove ineffective, corneal transplantation emerges as the sole therapeutic option. The likelihood of procuring corneas rises when an individual registers as an organ or cornea donor with a transplant organization, particularly if the family is informed or made aware of this intention. This holds true in both opt-in and soft opt-out transplant systems, where the family's decision significantly influences the outcome. Given that brochures are widely accepted as effective health education tools, there's a pressing need to evaluate various informational/educational brochures aimed at enhancing public readiness to donate corneas.
Aim: The aim of this study was to evaluate the effect of an information/educational brochure on the willingness of the public to donate corneas.
Materials and methods: A longitudinal study of within-group design was conducted, from May 2022 to January 2023. The research took place in Greece, mainly in the Attiki region, in the community. The conduct of the study was in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The study participants, 91 non-health professionals/students from the community, first gave their consent, in writing, after being informed of the details of the research project. For data collection, a self-administered questionnaire with closed-ended questions was used. Following the initial administration of the questionnaire (the pretest one), members of the research team gave participants a brochure on corneal donation, kindly recommending that they read/study it. After one to five days, participants were approached again by the researchers and asked to complete a questionnaire again (the posttest one), but this time with one question, the question about their attitude towards corneal donation. For inferential statistical analysis, the McNemar-Bowker statistical test was used to compare the difference in the percentages of each attitude towards corneal donation before and after the intervention.

Results: Regarding sociodemographic characteristics, 54.4% of the respondents were male, 43.5% were aged between 36 and 45 years, 53.8% were unmarried, 34.8% had only a BSc degree, and 44.0% were employed. In terms of cornea donor characteristics, 27.5% of respondents were willing to be a cornea donor before the brochure intervention and 50.0% after the intervention. The percentage of study participants willing to become a cornea donor before the brochure intervention in a sample of 91 individuals was significantly different from the percentage willing to become a cornea donor after the intervention (27.5% -25/91- versus 49.5% -45/91-, p<0.001).
Conclusions: Community health educators, physicians and nurses could use brochures as a cost-effective and efficient means of increasing public awareness of corneal and other solid organ donation.

Keywords: *Cornea transplants; cornea donors; donation willingness; information/educational brochure.*

Introduction

The cornea is the transparent structure that serves as the primary barrier to infection and support, as well as the actual frontal refractive surface of the eye.[1,2] Corneal conditions such as bullous keratopathy, keratoconus, descemetocele, ocular infections that do not respond to antimicrobial therapy, as well as perforating ocular injuries,[2,3] can lead to blindness.[4,5] In accordance with the literature,[4,5] corneal disease-related blindness accounted for 4.0% of global visual impairment. If corneal transparency is impaired and all conservative, surgical, or other medical treatments have failed, corneal transplantation is the only therapeutic option.[2,3,6,7] Corneal transplantation is the most common type of human tissue transplant performed in the world, with more than 180,000 corneal transplants performed worldwide each year. The procedure involves replacement of the unhealthy host tissue with clear, disease-free donor tissue.[2,3,6,7] However, due to the global shortage of cornea donors, it is estimated that only 1 out of every 70 patients eligible for a corneal transplant actually receives one.[7]

To address the shortage of available corneal transplants, successful interventional studies have been performed to increase the willingness to donate corneal tissue.[8,9] For example, Tsigkos et al.,[9] found that a 5-minute online educational intervention about corneal diseases and transplantation had an immediate impact of 14.7% on donation awareness. Bae and Kang,[8] also evaluated an entertainment/education show to change social norms about organ/tissue donation for the visually impaired. In that study,[8] the number of signed cornea donor cards increased from 1,239 to 1,733 in four months. According to the literature,[10] the brochure is acceptable to the target group as a health education tool. However, no study to date has evaluated the effect of an educational/information brochure on increasing the public's willingness towards cornea donation.

Aim

The aim of this study was to evaluate the effect of information/educational brochure on the public's willingness to donate corneas.

Research questions

1. How do the demographics and various attitudes of the public concerning cornea donation change before and after the intervention involving information/educational brochures?
2. Can we quantify the effect of these brochures on enhancing the public's willingness to donate corneas?

Materials and methods

Study design

A longitudinal study of within-group design was conducted.

Setting

The present study was carried out in the context of a postdoctoral research at the Medical School of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. The research took place in Greece, mainly in the Attiki region, in the community. The conduct of the study was in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).[11] The study participants first gave their consent, in writing, after being informed of the details of the research. The information collected was limited to that which was strictly necessary to draw conclusions (e.g., respondents were not asked for their exact age, but

rather the class to which they belonged, limiting embarrassment questions). Furthermore, the data intended for processing were securely stored under the stewardship of a designated individual from the research team, ensuring its exclusive use for addressing the research questions at hand.

Research subjects

Non-health professionals/students from the community participated in the study.

Recruitment

Participant recruitment was carried out on a convenience basis. From May 2022 to January 2023, the principal investigator approached ninety-two non-health science students/community members, irrespective of their status as registered organ donors or possession of a donor card. This approach was adopted in light of literature suggesting that less than one-third of the public in Greece is aware of what the cornea is, understands cornea-related blindness, or expresses a desire to become a cornea donor.[9] The sample size was calculated according to the Lipsey's Sample Size Table in Creswell[12] and was found to be at least 65 participants, for a within-group research design. This estimate resulted after considering the effect size of the dependent variable on a "0-2" three-point Likert-type scale. Since the totality of the dependent variable can be mirrored on number "1" (in agreement with Lipsey's Sample Size Table in Creswell (12)), its two steps ("0-1" and "1-2") are divided by the number "0.5", settling the effect size being 0.5. As participants' contact details were needed to achieve post-intervention follow-up, data were collected anonymously and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was followed.[11] The study participants first gave their consent, in writing, after being informed of the details of the research. Moreover, the information collected was limited to what was strictly necessary to draw conclusions (e.g., respondents were not asked for their exact age, but rather for the class to which they belonged, thus limiting questions of embarrassment). In addition, the data to be processed were kept in a secure manner by a responsible person designated by the research team and were used solely for the purpose of answering the research questions at hand.

Brochure development

The creation of the informative/educational brochure to increase the public's willingness to donate corneas is described in detail in the study by Kossioris et al..[13] In this study, a mixed-methods design was used to create the brochure. The participants in the study[13] were 25 ophthalmology residents, specialists as well as nurses, and an interview guide was used for data collection. Thirteen of the twenty-five (52%) participants in this study[13] responded that they could use the brochure in their practice. The following four themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the qualitative data from this research:[13] (i) "No comments on possible improvements", 15/25 (60%); (ii) "Very positive statements regarding the brochure", 6/25 (24%); (iii) "Suggestions for changes to the images/illustrations" 2/25 (8%); and (iv) "Suggestions for changes to the brochure's text order" 3/25 (12%). In conclusion, the brochure produced to increase public willingness towards corneal donation in this study[13] was considered adequate and capable of achieving its purpose.

Data collection - intervention

For data collection, a self-administered questionnaire with closed-ended questions was used. A paper version of the questionnaire was created. A Google Forms version was also created, and electronic responses were received. The questionnaire contained nine statements, eight of which were about socio-demographic data and one of which, a "0-10" visual analog scale (VAS), was about the spirituality level. The eighth item in the series (the aforementioned VAS) was about the level of spirituality and was developed according to the study by Rajab et al.[14] In addition, the questionnaire included a rudimentary reference with information about the cornea (in short, what the cornea is and in which part of the eye it is located), since it is a relatively unknown term to the public and lack of rudimentary knowledge would not help in answering the questions validly. Moreover, it was imperative that the respondents provided truthful responses to the posed questions.

Following the initial administration of the questionnaire (the pretest one), members of the research team gave participants a brochure on corneal donation, kindly recommending that they read/study it. After one to five days, participants were approached again by the researchers and asked to complete a questionnaire again (the post-test one), but this time with one question, the question about their attitude towards corneal donation. Among the participants, one individual did not respond to the question regarding their attitude towards corneal donation in the initial questionnaire. However, they provided a response in the subsequent questionnaire, and hence, their input was included in the sample.

The measured parameters pertained to the following aspects:

- *Sociodemographic characteristics:* Gender, age (years), marital status, highest education level, profession, employment status, residence, religion, religion association status, and spirituality level, and

Table 1. Frequencies of the non-health sciences student/health professionals, as well as of the different attitudes towards corneal donation willingness characteristics before and after the brochure's intervention.

Characteristics	**n**	**Results***
Sociodemographic		
Gender	(92)	Women=45.6%; Men=54.4%
Age (years)	(92)	36-45=43.5%; 46-60=32.6%; 26-35=17.4%; 18-25=5.4%; >60=1.1%
Marital status	(91)	Married=53.8%; Unmarried=36.3%; Divorced=6.6%; Cohabitation=2.2%; Widowed=1.1%
Highest education level	(92)	BSc=34.8%; Post-secondary education=33.7% High School (grades 10-12)=19.6% Master's degree=7.6% High School (grades 7-9)=3.3% PhD=1.1%; Primary school only=0.0%
Highest education level (three categories)	(92)	Secondary education=56.5% Tertiary education=43.5% Primary education=0.0%
Profession	(91)	Civil servant=44.0%; Private employee=29.7%; Student=4.4%; Unemployed=4.4% Freelance=12.1%; Household=3.3% Pensioner=2.2%
Employment status	(91)	In the labor market=85.7% Not in the labor market=14.3%
Residence	(90)	Attica region/Prefecture capital=78.9 Countryside=21.1%
Religion	(91)	Christian Orthodox=98.9% Not associated with a religion =1.1%
Religion association status	(91)	Associated with a religion=98.9% Not associated with a religion=1.1%
Spirituality level	(91)	7(5-8)
Cornea donation willingness		
Willingness to donate a cornea before the intervention	(91)	"I have not decided whether I want to become a cornea donor"=59.3% "I wish to become a cornea donor"=27.5% "I would not like to become a cornea donor"=13.2%
Willingness to donate a cornea after the intervention	(92)	"I wish to become a cornea donor"=50.0% "I have not decided whether I want to become a cornea donor"=38.0% "I would not like to become a cornea donor"=12.0%

*Results are %, Median (Interquartile range)

Table 2. Data regarding the investigation of whether there is a relationship between an information/educational brochure on increasing public's willingness to donate corneas (determinant) and the public's willingness to donate corneas (outcome) (23)

			Willingness to donate a cornea after giving the brochure			
			"I would not like to become a cornea donor"	"I have not decided whether I want to become a cornea donor"	"I wish to become a cornea donor"	Total
Willingness to donate a cornea before the brochure is given	"I would not like to become a cornea donor"	Count	10	2	0	12
	"I have not decided whether I want to become a cornea donor"	Count	1	33	20	54
	"I wish to become a cornea donor"	Count	0	0	25	25
	Total	Count	11	35	45	91

$\chi^2(2)^*=20.33$, $p<0.001$
*(Degrees of freedom)

- *Cornea donation willingness characteristics before and after the intervention:* "I would not like to become a cornea donor", "I have not decided whether I want to become a cornea donor", and "I wish to become a cornea donor" attitudes.

The parameter " Residence" was transformed from a variable with three categories to a variable with two categories "Countryside" and "Attica region/Prefecture capital", since it was observed that some respondents answered, "Attica region" or "Prefecture capital" interchangeably, confusing the two terms.

Statistical analysis

The IBM SPSS 28 software package was used for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

Frequencies of sociodemographic and corneal donation willingness characteristics were calculated in the descriptive analysis. For inferential statistical analysis, the McNemar-Bowker statistical test was used to compare the difference in the percentages of each attitude towards corneal donation before and after the intervention (i.e., the administration of the brochure). An alpha value of .05 was used for the inferential statistical analysis test.

Results

Descriptive

In terms of sociodemographic characteristics, 54.4% of respondents were men, 43.5% of the participants were between 36 and 45 years of age, 53.8% were unmarried, 34.8% had only a BSc degree, and 44.0% were civil servants.

Regarding the willingness to donate corneas, 27.5% of the respondents were willing to become a cornea donor before the brochure intervention, while 50.0% after the intervention.

All the descriptive results are shown in detail in Table 1.

Inferential

The percentage of study participants who wished to become a cornea donor before the brochure intervention, in a sample of 91 people, was significantly different from the percentage who wished to become a cornea donor after the intervention (27.5% -25/91- versus 49.5% -45/91-, $p<0.001$). All inferential results are presented in Table 2.

Discussion

The most significant finding of this study was the impactful influence of the information/educational brochure on public willingness to donate corneas. Before the brochure intervention, out of a sample of 91 people, only 27.5% (25/91) expressed a willingness to donate corneas. Following the intervention, this figure substan-

tially increased to 49.5% (45/91), demonstrating a statistically significant change (p<0.001).

The findings of this study align with those from multiple previous investigations into organ donation. For instance, a study by Bidigare and Ellis[15] saw a rise in commitment to organ donation among family physicians' patients following two interventions, one of which involved a brochure. Out of 247 participants, 30.8% who had previously not committed to organ donation expressed a willingness post-intervention, despite no significant statistical difference between the two interventions. Our results also corroborate the study by Reubsaet et al.[16], which found no superiority of a computer-tailored intervention over a brochure-based one in increasing secondary school students' willingness to donate organs. Furthermore, a study by Rodrigue et al.[17], that used brochures as a baseline intervention, reported a higher rate of organ donation registrations than the group that received a video message intervention. Finally, the findings mirror those of a UK study by Penn-Jones et al.[18], where an intervention involving brochures and posters was implemented in a general practitioners' waiting room over a three-month period. Here, 43.3% of patients who received this intervention joined the NHS Organ Donor Register. These results affirm the efficacy of brochure-based interventions in promoting organ donation.

Contrary to our findings, several studies have found no significant impact of brochure-based interventions on willingness to donate organs. For instance, a study by Murakami et al.[19] performed an intervention involving a brochure among medical students up to their third year of study (n=173). However, it did not yield a statistically significant effect on their willingness to donate organs following brain or cardiac death (p=0.72 and 0.43 respectively). Similarly, a study by Feeley et al.[20] applied an intervention to clients at New York Motor Vehicle Offices to increase willingness to donate organs. Despite involving a brochure, it did not result in a heightened consent to donate. In addition, a large-scale study by Quick et al.[21], which examined various interventions among tens of thousands of clients at Motor Vehicle Facilities in Illinois over six months, found no statistically significant effect on organ donation registrations following a print intervention that included brochures. Lastly, a study by McCabe et al.[22], involving a brochure-based intervention in a sample of 2391 primary care providers' patients, found a significant reduction in organ donation registrations (OR 0.181, 95% CI 0.135-0.244, p<0.001), further diverging from our study's results.

Conclusions

Corneal transplantation is the only therapeutic option available when corneal transparency is compromised and all conservative, surgical, or other medical treatments have failed. When an individual registers as an organ or cornea donor with a transplant organization, and their family is informed or made aware of this decision, the potential for successful organ procurement increases in both opt-in and soft opt-out transplant systems, assuming a comprehensive postmortem framework is in place. The brochure is an accepted tool in health education. Hence, it's crucial to assess the effectiveness of various informational and educational brochures aimed at enhancing the public's readiness to donate corneas. In this study, following a brochure-based intervention targeted at the public to encourage cornea donations, we observed a significant 22% increase in willingness to donate (p<0.001). According to this result, health educators in the community, i.e., physicians and nurses, could use the brochure as a cost-effective and efficient means to increase the public's willingness to donate corneas and other solid organs in general.

ABSTRACT

Ο αντίκτυπος ενός ενημερωτικού φυλλαδίου στην προθυμία δωρεάς κερατοειδούς

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Εισαγωγή: Η μεταμόσχευση κερατοειδούς είναι η μόνη διαθέσιμη θεραπευτική επιλογή, όταν η διαφάνεια του κερατοειδούς είναι μειωμένη και όλες οι συντηρητικές, χειρουργικές ή άλλες ιατρικές θεραπείες έχουν αποτύχει. Όταν ένα άτομο εγγράφεται ως δωρητής οργάνων ή κερατοειδούς σε έναν οργανισμό μεταμοσχεύσεων και η οικογένειά του είναι ενήμερη, τόσο σε ένα σύστημα μεταμοσχεύσεων "opt-in" όσο και σε ένα σύστημα μεταμοσχεύσεων "soft opt-out", όπου η απόφαση της οικογένειας παίζει ρόλο, αυξάνονται οι πιθανότητες να λάβει τελικά τα όργανά του. Το φυλλάδιο είναι ένα αποδεκτό εργαλείο αγωγής υγείας και, ως εκ τούτου, πρέπει να αξιολογηθούν διαφορετικά ενημερωτικά/εκπαιδευτικά φυλλάδια για την αύξηση της προθυμίας του κοινού να δωρίσει κερατοειδή.
Σκοπός: Σκοπός της παρούσας μελέτης ήταν να αξιολογηθεί η επίδραση ενός ενημερωτικού/εκπαιδευτικού φυλλαδίου στην προθυμία του κοινού να δωρίσει κερατοειδή.
Υλικά και μέθοδοι: Διεξήχθη διαχρονική μελέτη σχεδιασμού εντός ομάδας, από τον Μάιο του 2022 έως τον Ιανουάριο του 2023. Η έρευνα πραγματοποιήθηκε στην Ελλάδα, κυρίως στην περιοχή της Αττικής, στην κοινότητα. Η διεξαγωγή της μελέτης ήταν σύμφωνη με τον Γενικό Κανονισμό για την Προστασία Δεδομένων (General Data Protection Regulation -GDPR-). Οι συμμετέχοντες στη μελέτη, 91 μη επαγγελματίες/φοιτητές υγείας από την κοινότητα, έδωσαν πρώτα τη συγκατάθεσή τους, εγγράφως, αφού ενημερώθηκαν για τις λεπτομέρειες της έρευνας. Για τη συλλογή δεδομένων χρησιμοποιήθηκε αυτοδιαχειριζόμενο ερωτηματολόγιο με ερωτήσεις κλειστού τύπου. Μετά την αρχική χορήγηση του ερωτηματολογίου (το ερωτηματολόγιο προελέγχου), τα μέλη της ερευνητικής ομάδας έδωσαν στους συμμετέχοντες ένα φυλλάδιο σχετικά με τη δωρεά κερατοειδούς, συνιστώντας τους ευγενικά να το διαβάσουν/μελετήσουν. Μετά από μία έως πέντε ημέρες, οι ερευνητές προσέγγισαν ξανά τους συμμετέχοντες και τους ζήτησαν να συμπληρώσουν ξανά ένα ερωτηματολόγιο (το ερωτηματολόγιο μεταελέγχου), αλλά αυτή τη φορά με μία ερώτηση, την ερώτηση σχετικά με τη στάση τους απέναντι στη δωρεά κερατοειδούς. Για την επαγωγική στατιστική ανάλυση, χρησιμοποιήθηκε το στατιστικό τεστ McNemar-Bowker για να συγκριθεί η διαφορά στα ποσοστά κάθε στάσης απέναντι στη δωρεά κερατοειδούς πριν και μετά την παρέμβαση.
Αποτελέσματα: Όσον αφορά τα κοινωνικοδημογραφικά χαρακτηριστικά, το 54,4% των ερωτηθέντων ήταν άνδρες, το 43,5% ήταν ηλικίας μεταξύ 36 και 45 ετών, το 53,8% ήταν άγαμοι, το 34,8% είχε μόνο πτυχίο BSc και το 44,0% ήταν εργαζόμενοι. Όσον αφορά τα χαρακτηριστικά των δωρητών κερατοειδούς, το 27,5% των ερωτηθέντων ήταν πρόθυμοι να γίνουν δωρητές κερατοειδούς πριν από την παρέμβαση του φυλλαδίου και το 50,0% μετά την παρέμβαση. Το ποσοστό των συμμετεχόντων στη μελέτη που ήταν πρόθυμοι να γίνουν δωρητές κερατοειδούς πριν από την παρέμβαση με το φυλλάδιο σε δείγμα 91 ατόμων διέφερε σημαντικά από το ποσοστό που ήταν πρόθυμοι να γίνουν δωρητές κερατοειδούς μετά την παρέμβαση (27,5% -25/91- έναντι 49,5% -45/91-, $p<0,001$).
Συμπεράσματα: Ως αποτέλεσμα, οι εκπαιδευτές υγείας της κοινότητας, οι γιατροί και οι νοσηλευτές, θα μπορούσαν να χρησιμοποιήσουν τα ενημερωτικά φυλλάδια ως ένα οικονομικά αποδοτικό και αποτελεσματικό μέσο για την αύξηση της ευαισθητοποίησης του κοινού σχετικά με τη δωρεά κερατοειδούς και άλλων συμπαγών οργάνων.

Λέξεις-ευρετηρίου: Μοσχεύματα κερατοειδούς, δωρητές κερατοειδούς, προθυμία δωρεάς, ενημερωτικό/εκπαιδευτικό φυλλάδιο.

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