

Neuroethics complexities in Bone marrow donation

This commentary aims to discuss neuroethics and its complications in regards to educating general public and pursuing them for an act of donation to save a life. I will start by explaining what neuroethics entails and narrow the discussion down to a general criticism on how the public awareness is made for bone marrow donation.

Entailing the ethical issues in behavioural neuroscience, neuroethics studies the social, legal, ethical and policy implications of advances in neuroscience. Internal neuroethics society (INS)'s objective is to help the public understand the issues raised by this research and the powerful new tools being developed such as the neurobiology of decision-making and applications - in areas such as marketing, and others.¹

Decision making is one of the most important issues in neuroethics because of its complexity in certain situation and feasibility due to the problem of conscious in some patients. The process of decision making can be guided or if not done correctly may be misguided. As important as the neuroethics issues are the information and guidance on decision making may be fatal. One of the greatest campaigns on internet is the bone marrow donation. The World Marrow Donor Association (WMDA) is a voluntary organisation of representatives of blood stem cell donor registries, cord blood banks, other organisations and individuals with an interest in blood stem cell transplantation.² On its website, WMDA offers information on how the procedure is done and the associated risks with each type of donation. For example in Blood stem cell collection less than 1% of donors experience a serious side effect from the PBSC donation process.³ However this is not the full story. The marketing campaign for such an initiative is not completely objective on the news and internet. Gift of Life, an associate donor registry of the National Marrow Donor Program and an accredited body of WMDA uses an informative strategy to educate the donors before making a decision. It explains about the risks and benefits of donation and advise against being a donor without considering their commitment carefully. If the donor registers for such a donation and changes their mind during the preparation period of the patient- which includes chemotherapy and radiation- without the donor's healthy stem cells, the patient would die.

The problem arises when the media only considers the first step which is the matching blood cells. People are being encouraged to do the preliminary registration by false marketing, sometimes only pointing out the only necessary step "Just a swab can save a life". Such advertisement can be successful as it draws the attention of the majority. It is amazing that someone can give a second life to a stranger just by a swab in their mouth. But does end justify the means? Shouldn't the people be informed about a more lengthy procedure before they make a decision on their registration?

One can argue that for such a great cause, a small sacrifice, telling a white lie is justifiable, but it is the manipulation of decision making process. The morality of the act is still questionable and a definitive answer is not easy to reach. It is true that if all the people who undergo the preliminary swab know about the risks associated with the procedure many of them withdraw right away. But on the other hand if they undergo the donation the reward is invaluable. Saving a life is probably the biggest thing anyone can do for humanity, but if it has been the consequence of an unconscious choice or let's say uneducated choice is it still a plus point? It is difficult to judge in such cases.

The general public should be well informed of the correct and complete information before making a decision. In cases such as saving a life the judgement on the means to draw people's attention to the cause is a difficult task.

¹ <http://www.neuroethicssociety.org/>

² <https://www.wmda.info/about-us/who-we-are>

³ <https://www.wmda.info/donors/risks>