



Letters and Commentary

Combined heart–liver transplantation in the UK

V Dronavalli, S Clark

Freeman Hospital, UK
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CORRESPONDENCE TO

V Dronavalli, E: v.dronavalli@nhs.net

We read with interest the meta-analysis on combined heart–liver transplantation by Frountzas *et al.* This presents excellent survival of 85% at 1 year in this challenging cohort of patients, similar to that expected in the UK from isolated heart transplantation alone. Despite the complexity of the surgery required, commendable outcomes can be achieved in those selected for surgery.

The reality however in UK practice is that such operations are an extreme rarity. NHS Blood and Transplant data shows that only five combined heart–liver transplants were performed over the decade between April 2011 and March 2021. In the same time period, 1,443 isolated heart transplants were undertaken in the context of an ever-expanding waiting list, the challenges of the donor organ shortage and the more recent concomitant effects on donation and transplantation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The need for combined heart–liver transplantation may increase significantly in the future as more patients with congenital heart disease survive to adulthood and the

prevalence of ischaemic heart disease complicated by cirrhosis expands.¹

Given the profound lack of experience and familiarity with combined transplantation in the UK, meeting this challenge will be difficult without specialisation of cardiothoracic and hepatic transplant services with collaboration from all members of the multidisciplinary team. Focussing expertise in one unit may be a solution given current very low activity volumes where heart and liver transplant programs are colocated to build experience and establish best practice that can then be shared in due course with other units as case numbers build. This may be best placed in centres with adult congenital heart programs given the likely indications for transplantation in the future. Donation pathways should also be optimised to provide multiple organs to those waiting and reduce any potential disadvantage to this cohort through the established urgent systems for hearts and livers alike.

Selected patients needing combined heart and liver transplantation can be assured of excellent outcomes but UK experience needs to increase substantially and focussed expertise established to achieve this goal.

Reference

1. Alexopoulos SP, Kelly Wu W, Ziogas IA *et al.* Adult combined heart–liver transplantation: the United States experience. *Transpl Int* 2022; **35**: 10036.