

The Medical Practitioner's View of Life and Death

Regarding their attitude toward organ transplantation

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In this thesis, a view of life and death is explored from the viewpoint of medical professionals. The reason for taking up their viewpoints is because their work often straddles the line between life and death. Ordinary people might encounter news of the death of a third person every day, but they rarely have the experience with the death of a person by their side. In other words, this thesis explores a way of life as lived from the viewpoint of those who work on the front lines of life and death under the practice of medicine.

In 1997, an organ transplantation law was first enforced in Japan and was revised in 2010. Since then, organ transplantation upon a patient being rendered “brain dead” has been promoted. Such transplantation after being brain dead made vague the issue of how we can draw a line between life and death or if it is possible for us to actually draw that line.

With this issue in mind, in this study, the author conducted interviews with medical practitioners on the topic of brain-dead patients and the issue of life and death, and analyzed their stories using a narrative approach. It became clear that even medical practitioners, in reality, hesitated to conclude that being brain dead means an actual human death. However, in medical settings, the daily practice of medicine has grown over time, creating conflicts between saving the life of patients and attitudes toward hesitation. In other words, medical practitioners need to conduct their daily routines all within the confines of an unsolvable contradiction between life and death created by the advancement of medicine.

In conclusion, to be familiar with the actual situation of medicine may make people take a different viewpoint on the issues of transplantation regarding brain-dead patients. Furthermore, how we as human beings can respond to the advancement of medicine requires us to further explore the human existence.